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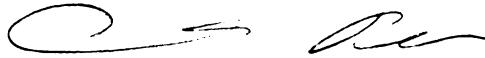NUR YIGITOGLU

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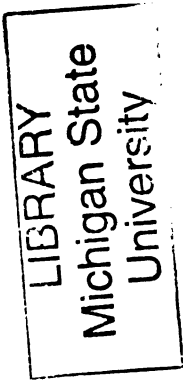of the requirements for the

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A PATHWAY BETWEEN ACADEMIC AND ESL CLASSES: ACADEMIC TASKS
AND THEIR POTENTIAL IMPACT ON TEACHING AND TESTING WRITING

By

Nur Yigitoglu

A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

# A PATHWAY BETWEEN ACADEMIC AND ESL CLASSES: ACADEMIC TASKS AND POTENTIAL IMPACT ON TEACHING AND TESTING WRITING

By

Nur Yigitoglu

The present study attempts to fill a gap in L2 writing research literature by examining large samples of syllabi and assignment handouts in university content classes and investigating their potential impact on ESL writing classes. In the first part of the study, the investigated constructs were the categories of writing assignments of various programs, their cognitive demands, and their prompt formats. Content analysis design was employed to categorize a variety of assignments from approximately four departments from each college at a large Midwestern university. After syllabi and handouts from 350 different content courses were collected, a descriptive scheme was developed. Results indicated that, among the out-of-class writing assignments students were required to do in content classes, the most frequent genres were research papers and reaction papers. The results also revealed their cognitive demands differed according to the level of the courses for which the assignments were given. Analyses also indicated that text-based prompts are the most common prompts in these assignments. The second part of the study investigated the potential impact of such content analyses on actual ESL teaching. 13 ESL writing teachers were interviewed. Results revealed that the potential impact of such analyses depended on the proficiency level of ESL classes. The ways to establish an agenda for future research based on the teachers' comments are also discussed.

# DEDICATION

I dedicate my thesis to my father, who was tremendously supportive of my pursuing a

degree in a graduate school in the U.S., and who passed away before seeing the final

product and my next step in a doctoral program.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

"[A]ll of us who have tried to write something in a second language [...] sense that the process of writing in an L2 startlingly different from writing in our L1". Quoting Raimes (1985, p. 232), I confess that I had not realized this difference before writing a research study on L2 writing. As a second language writer, I found this process challenging and I want to acknowledge some people who supported me before and during my thesis writing.

I would first like to express my gratitude to Dr. Charlene Polio, my committee chair. Dr. Polio gave me the inspiration to start and guidance to complete my thesis. Her comments, questions, and concerns have developed my understanding of L2 writing research. She has also been my mentor throughout my pursuit of a master's degree and her encouragement and support has been valuable.

I would also like to thank Dr. Debra Friedman, my academic and thesis advisor. The independent study Dr. Friedman developed for me gave me a strong background on genre theory, on which I based the theoretical background of my thesis. Her support, guidance and constructive feedback have been incredibly helpful in improving the final version.

I am also indebted to the professors, ESL instructors, and raters who made this study possible. I wish to thank Dilek Yazici for supporting and encouraging me from afar. I also would like to thank Fulbright Commission for giving me a chance and financial support to complete my MA degree at Michigan State University.

Lastly, I would like to thank my parents, Aziz and Gulnaz Yigitoglu, for their emotional and financial support. Even though they are hundred of miles away, their love and thoughts are always here with me.

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# 1. Introduction

Teaching and assessing ESL writing appropriately is difficult. Its difficulty may come from its complex nature. For instance, a writing teacher or assessor, when designing a writing prompt, should consider format, procedure, genre, length of time, students' level and interest and level of the assignment, topic choice, and whether to offer a choice of prompts or not. In planning ESL writing classes, and in designing writing prompts, teachers and/or assessors are alone deciding all these criteria. Horowitz (1986) suggested that creating realistic writing tasks largely depended on EAP teachers' "guesswork" (p. 445). Thus, writing requirements in university content classes is an area that needs to be investigated to shed some light on the complex process of teaching as well as assessing ESL writing.

Research studies which have focused on academic writing for the last 20 years have emphasized the importance of academic writing (e.g. Horowitz, 1986; Leki & Carlson, 1997; Rosenfeld, Leung, & Oltman, 2001; Samraj, 2002). However, as Russel (1991) noted, "the role of writing in academia -both research and teaching- remained largely transparent, unexamined" (p.10). Taking its importance into account, researchers have attempted to look at this issue from different perspectives and give some insights to teachers and assessors (e.g. Hinkel, 2004; Hyland, 2003; Swales & Feak, 2000, 2004).

Brown (2004) acknowledged that research in academic writing performance was generally restricted by "the pedagogical necessities of establishing the basic building blocks of writing" (p. 232). As such, what to teach, and accordingly, what to assess in academic writing has remained an unresolved issue. This need to better understand the nature and types of academic tasks required in academia and to gain some insight about

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teaching academic writing have led researchers to explain and describe academic writing assignments (Carson, 2001; Horowitz, 1986; Hale, Taylor, Bridgeman, Carson., Kroll, & Kantor, R.,1996; Reid 2001). Rarely, however, has research investigated the impact of this type of analysis, which can also be seen as an initial needs analysis, on actual ESL teaching and assessing. This study examines university syllabi and assignment handouts to determine the cognitive demands, genre, and prompt format of the writing tasks in content classes. As such, the intent of the present study is to understand the nature of the academic tasks in mainstream university courses. In addition, this study further investigates the possible impact of this type of analysis on actual ESL teaching and assessing through interviews with ESL teachers.

## 2. Review of research

Prior work in the area of second language writing has attempted to describe academic writing assignments from different perspectives. The previous research studies in this area can be grouped in three main classes: the research studies that investigated the writing assignments in content classes in general, the research studies that focused on only specific areas such as business and engineering, and the research studies that looked at faculty and student views on academic writing. The basic information about the literature in this area is summarized in Table 1.

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Table 1. Previous research on writing assignments

| General analysis of writing assignments in content classes | Horowitz (1986): N= 36<br>Hale et al. (1996): N=162 |
| --- | --- |
| Focused analysis of writing assignments in content classes | Zhu (2004a): N= 95<br>Jackson, Meyer, and Parkinson (2006):N= 47 |
| Faculty and student views on academic writing | Zhu (2004a): 6 participants<br>Zhu (2004b): 11 participants<br>Leki and Carson (1997): 27 participants |

In this table, N refers to the number of writing assignment items that are analyzed.

## 2.1. Research on content classes

### 2.1.1. General analysis of writing assignments in content classes

The first research attempting to describe academic writing assignments was Horowitz (1986), which this research expanded upon. Before Horowitz, this kind of research on assignments had been analyzed with the help of surveys (e.g., Bridgman & Carlson, 1984; Johns, 1981; Kroll, 1979; Ostler, 1980), which asked university students and faculty members to classify writing assignments. As these could not satisfactorily explain the actual nature of assignments, the perspective of the research and results were limited, Horowitz tried to fill a gap in this area. The research was conducted at Western Illinois University. The researcher contacted 750 faculty members, 36 of whom sent data that could be used in that specific study. Horowitz requested tests which had included writing tasks and handouts of any assignments to analyze.

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Analyzing their differences, Horowitz found seven categories of assignments, which were summaries of or reactions to reading, annotated bibliographies, reports on a specified participatory experience, connections between theory and data, case studies, syntheses of multiple sources, and research projects. This study was unique in that it was the first descriptive study which examined actual handouts and examinations, but the small response rate made it difficult to generalize the conclusions. Moreover, it only included assignments at the undergraduate level.

In the most comprehensive study carried out thus far, Hale et al. (1996) analyzed writing tasks assigned in 162 graduate and undergraduate courses in various disciplines at eight universities in a research report conducted by Educational Testing Service. The data consisted of course syllabi and copies of all writing tasks assigned in those courses were requested. After collecting the assigned writing tasks, they developed a database out of 162 sets.

The researchers employed two steps in the classification scheme of the data collected: First, they examined the data, and reported their observations of the writing tasks classified by discipline. Next, they examined the rest of the materials closely, and, at the end, developed an initial classification scheme. As they analyzed the data, some additions were made to the scheme. After a tentative classification scheme was established, a preliminary classification of sample assignments was made in order to observe the final adjustments needed. After the final adjustments, the final version of the classification scheme was applied to all assignment sets. They examined the frequency of assignment types in both in-class and out-of-class writing assignments, as well as the characteristics of essay assignments. Results provided a classification scheme to shed

some light in the area. The results regarding genre included ten categories: essay, library research paper, report of experiment/ observation without interpretation, report of experiment/ observation with interpretation, summary (includes annotated bibliography without comment), case study, plan/ proposal, documented computer program, book review, and unstructured writing. This survey, including more data, reported a larger range of genres than Horowitz (1986).

## 2.1.2. Focused analysis of writing assignments in content classes

Other studies have reported the writing demands of content courses in particular disciplines. Zhu (2004a) reported a study on the analysis of assignment types in business courses. He collected 95 course syllabi and handouts of writing assignments. Similar to Hale et al. (1996), this research study also included writing assignments required in undergraduate and graduate courses in six departments in the college of business administration at a large university in the United States. Twelve students' writing samples, handouts, portions of textbooks required of writing assignments, records of discussions with business professors, and qualitative interviews with business faculty members were analyzed to better understand the characteristic nature of the major business assignments.

Zhu came up with nine genre types of business assignments: case analysis, article/book report, business report, business proposal, design project, library research, reflection paper, letters and memos, research proposal/ paper, and miscellaneous.

Jackson, Meyer, and Parkinson (2006) investigated the types and amounts of writing and reading tasks expected from undergraduate science students at a South African university. The research was based on questionnaires given to academic faculty across three campuses. After the questionnaires were distributed, a total of 47 questionnaires were received representing 14 disciplines: agriculture, biochemistry, biology, botany, chemistry, computer science, dietetics, geography, geology, microbiology, mathematics, physics, statistics and zoology. The results regarding writing tasks suggested that three and four pieces of writing on average were expected of students per semester-long module and report was the most common genre of writing tasks. When grading these tasks, academic faculty appeared to pay attention to the organization of written assignments followed by the attention to referencing conventions. This study demonstrated the importance of analyzing faculty expectations to better understand the nature of writing tasks required in content classes. The findings of this study would have been more generalizable if a larger sample from other institutions were included. In addition, using questionnaires to do this kind of research might limit the results.

## 2.2. Faculty and student views on academic writing

Some researchers have investigated faculty views on academic writing. Zhu (2004b) examined faculty views on the importance and nature of writing. Data were collected from ten interviews with business and engineering faculty members. Among the faculty members contacted via e-mail, the volunteers were interviewed and then these tape-recorded interviews were transcribed and coded. The results showed that although the importance of academic writing was emphasized by the business and engineering

faculty, some differences in the nature of academic writing skills could be found in different disciplines. Zhu (2004b) demonstrated the importance of looking at this issue from the insider's point of view, which was, in this specific case, faculty members in different departments. But one of the limitations of this study was the small sample size of the research involved. Thus, it is difficult to draw general conclusions from such a small size. The greater limitation to Zhu's work is that it is limited to a business context. As such, it might only be useful and sufficient for a business context.

Leki and Carson (1997) analyzed the discrepancy between content and ESL classes from an emic perspective, that is, the perspective of ESL students. In in-depth interviews with non-native English speaking university students, they explored how students perceive writing under different conditions. Interviews were conducted in two different phases in the same term so that students could get a chance to experience these three different writing conditions. They found three different academic writing situations that emerged through the content analysis of the interviews: writing without a source text, writing with a source text as springboard only, and writing with responsibility for source text content.

The results of the interviews suggested that writing requirements in ESL classes did not prepare students for their academic career in content classes. They found that in academic classes, the students were required to demonstrate their knowledge of the source text, but in ESL classes their personal experiences became source of content. They suggested that the difference between writing tasks and demands for ESL and those for content courses necessitated authentic writing tasks which would go beyond personal narratives and help students prepare for academic classes.

While focused analyses of assignments are useful for a specific context, more studies should be done to see the distribution of writing assignments across various domains. In addition, prior work on general analyses of writing assignments is a good representation of writing assignments in content classes, but they need to be updated after a period of time.

In comparing previous studies on general analysis of writing assignments, one can see that there can be some differences in identified patterns. For example, there were some major differences between Horowitz (1986) and Hale et al. (1996). Although there were common broad findings such as summaries, reports on a specified participatory experience, and case studies, Hale et al. (1996) found different requirements such as book reviews, unstructured writing, library research papers, plans/ proposals, and documented computer programs.

In addition, as a result of the different coding schemes employed in these assignments, there were differences between those findings which were seemingly common. Hale et al used more precise categories, while Horowitz put everything together into one category. For instance, Horowitz (1986) found a category that consisted of reports on a specified participatory experience, but Hale et al. (1996) found two different categories that may correspond to this single category: report of experiment/ observation without interpretation and report of experiment/ observation with interpretation.

Similarly, the genre Horowitz (1986) identified as "summary of/ reaction to a reading" was not the same as the "summary" Hale et al. (1996) reported, because the genre Horowitz analyzed included both summary and reaction, whereas the analysis in

Hale et al. (1996) revealed that summary also included annotated bibliography without interpretation.

The present study expands upon Horowitz (1986) with a larger sample size from various departments. But Miller (1984/ 1994b) also suggested that genres change over time. Thus, in order to investigate possible changes in identified patterns in literature and contribute to the validity of results of the previous studies, prior work needs to be updated. Thus, considering that genres are changing, this study also updates the findings of Hale et al. (1996).

The gap between academic and ESL writing classes has always been an issue. One possible way to shed light on this area can be analyzing the assignments given in content classes and develop ESL writing syllabi and curricula accordingly. Thus, these studies can benefit ESL instructors in a way that they will have a clearer picture of their students' needs. It is intended to benefit ESL students in that the instructors will be able to better meet their needs.

## 2.3. Different definitions of genre

A focus on genre is important for this study because previous research has examined is the genre demands of content courses. But this term is used differently by different people, and it is therefore important to come to a clear understanding of what *genre* is. As Johns (2007) has stated, people should have a definition of the term *genre* before using it because of the fuzziness of the term itself. Different schools in genre theory define and investigate *genre* in various ways. Therefore, a short summary of different definitions will be provided in this section.

Most definitions of genre have emphasized the importance of the similar situations or contexts that help to categorize the formal features of a text. These situations might have some commonalities in terms of conventions and expectations and construct a common pattern which helps people to recognize the genre and its key features. On the other hand, some definitions have focused on the text and its internal or linguistic conventions and assume that one can understand the situations through an analysis of the textual features. It is important to note that whether the focus is on texts or contexts, all of them seem to focus on the *purpose* or *function* of a text as a central part of the meaning of *genre*. According to Hyon (1996), current genre theories can be divided into three main schools, namely, the New Rhetoric, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and the Australian School. These main schools in genre analysis differ in their approach to genre analysis and their application of these approaches to the methods of teaching genre: the New Rhetoric analyzes social context whereas ESP and the Australian School focus on textual features.

## 2.3.1. Social context analysis: The New Rhetoric

The New Rhetoric views genre as a part of society and community. For these scholars, genre knowledge can be obtained by investigating the society and the context for which the text is written. Therefore, in their analysis of genre, they focus on the members and ideology of the discourse communities to define the features of genre. Miller (1984/ 1994b) proposed that the definition of *genre* had to be based "not on the substance or the form of discourse, but on the action it is used to accomplish" (p. 24). She proposed a type of hierarchy which included genre at higher levels as the "substance of

forms" (p. 37). In this way, *genre* seemed to be a large category which might include various types of text-types. As such, she defined genres as "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (p. 31). In her definition, she located genre within a social context which helped to interpret the actions or patterns that were similar. According to Coe (2002), the example of political brief as a genre would be under this system.

## 2.3.2. Textual features analyses: The Australian School and ESP

The Australian School and ESP in genre theory focus on the linguistic analysis of a text. They also agree that these linguistic forms are the product of the social purpose of the genre. According to these schools, teaching genre conventions and features can help the student to develop an understanding of genres.

## 2.3.2.1. The Australian School

Although ESP and the Australian school look at the linguistic features of a text, they differ in terms of the kinds of texts that they classify as genres. For example, Martin (2002), a representative of the Australian School in genre theory, defined genre as "a term I use to name configurations of meaning that are recurrently phased together to enact social practices" (p. 269). Thus, the focus in his definition of *genre* was distinctive configurations of oral and written texts. He suggested some *macro-genres* such as *service encounter family* (e.g., mail orders, small shop transactions), *appointment family* (e.g.

conference announcements, program scheduling), and *interviewing* (e.g. cross examination, counseling).

## 2.3.2.2. ESP

However, Paltridge (2002), an ESP practitioner, classifies those texts as "text types" which he distinguishes from *genre*. Borrowing from Biber (1989), Paltridge explains the term *genre* in the following way:

> For him [Biber], the term genre characterized text on the basis of external criteria, such as a text that is written or spoken by a particular person, for a particular audience, in particular context, for a particular purpose, and viewed by the discourse community as being an example of the particular genre. (p. 73-74)

Paltridge (2002) distinguished text types from the term "genre" stating that the definition of text types could be based on rhetorical modes such as *problem solution, exposition,* or *argument types*. For him, these types showed similarity in their internal discourse patterns. At this point, he agreed with Pilegaard and Frandsen (as cited in Paltridge, 2002), stating that text types were based on their "internal criteria", whereas genres were based on their "text external features and differences relating to the extralinguistic context" (p. 77).

Similarly, Bhatia (2002), another ESP practioner, distinguished several levels of generic description to explain the concept of genre. She claimed that there were different levels of communication and explained her argument as follows:

> The emerging picture, thus, posits at least three levels of conceptualization. At the top level we see the category of *generic value*, which is essentially independent of any grounded contextual constraints. The second level is that of more general *genre colony*, but these are rather loosely contextualized in terms of socially

recognizable situations. Finally, at the third level, we have what we call *individually identifiable generic constructs* [genres]. (p. 281)

As such, Bhatia argued that the communicative purpose of the genre could be attained by *rhetorical/ generic values,* which formed *genre colony.* In this way, these genre colonies included various genres.

The most famous practioner of ESP, Swales (1990), in his definition of *genre,* emphasized that a particular *genre* included different communicative events. He stated further that the members of these communicative events had some common communicative purposes. According to him, the authorities of parent *discourse community* introduced and justified the purposes of a *genre.* As such, his definition suggested that these authorities affected and restrained its content and style. Besides the discourse community, the main point in his definition was the *communicative events* that could give information about the *communicative purposes* of the *genre.* He explained that these purposes were realized through patterns of structure, style, content and audience of the *genre.* These linguistic patterns allow members of the community to realize a particular *genre* as being prototypical. In addition, in his description of genre, Swales also proposed that discourse communities label and validate the name of a *genre.* There was also communication between different communities in time, because some discourse communities generally validated these identified names and transferred them to their own communities.

### 2.3.3. A working definition of genre

As seen from the definitions listed above, definition of genre comprises many things to take into consideration. Tardy (as cited in Johns, Bawarshi, Coe, Hyland, Paltridge, Reiff & Tardy, 2006) granted that *genre* as a concept was complex. She suggested the process of unpacking *genre*, which was also related to her definition of *genre*:

> Whether we choose to analyze genres in terms of their textual features, social actions, communities of practice, power structures, or the networks and modalities in which they operate (and individual researchers nearly always need to limit themselves to only some of these), we know that we are only seeing a partial view of all that is 'going on' (p. 9f).

As such, Tardy defined *genre* as a multidimensional concept, whose levels should be dealt with separately in different stages of second language learning.

Although *genre* is difficult to define, it is necessary to have a clear definition for research purposes. Previous researchers also defined *genre* for the purposes of their own research. For instance, Hale et al. (1996) defined genre as "the task and conventional form associated with the product that is likely to result from the task" (p.11). That is, they analyzed the purpose (i.e. "task") and the conventional form used to accomplish that purpose.

For the purposes of this research, *genre* is defined according to Swales' definition because these categories reflect the community's perspective. As Johns (2003) commented, researchers coming from an ESP approach have categorized genres with the discourse communities they emerged from and, in this way, they use "the nomenclature

of these communities" to recognize the important and established genres in the area being questioned (p. 206).

In addition, the goal of the present study is to see the "communicative purpose" of the genres within each community. Most genres required in these academic departments have some features in common and these are established by the audience, in other words, professors in these departments. As Paltridge pointed out "Genres are ways in which people 'get things done' through their use of language in particular contexts" (as cited in Johns, et al., 2006, p.5). Considering the fact that one "purpose" of these assignments is for students to display their knowledge of the subject matter, these assignments may not always be the same as the genres in use by the expert members of the community. But still, one may argue that the genres required within the same departments may serve common purposes that are shared by most of the faculty in these departments. Thus, the genres analyzed in this research construct "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes" (Swales, 1990, p. 58).

## 2.4. Defining community

When one analyzes *genre*, the concept of *discourse community* always comes to mind. This is understandable because a genre is a part of what constitutes a community. Thus, it is possible to say that, in fact, the concepts of *genre* and *community* are like two sides of a coin: they need one another in order to be defined.

For the purposes of this study, the concept of *community* is defined according to Swales' definition. Swales (1990) used the term *discourse community* to refer to the

group of people who shaped the genre. His approach to this type of community was a broad one, because his definition might contain many different types of communities, including but not limited to academic communities. According to him, a group needs to have six characteristics in order to be defined as a *discourse community*: shared goals, mechanisms of intercommunication, participatory mechanisms for information and feedback, one or more genres in the communicative utterance of its aims, some specific lexis, and a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise. As in his definition of genre, he underlined the importance of communication and "a class of communicative events" (p. 58). This time, he acknowledged that the members of the community used genres as shared tools to communicate with each other.

Other researchers also defined the concept of *community*. For instance, Hyland (2000) focused only on academic community. He narrowed *community* down, and he coined the term *disciplinary cultures*. According to him, disciplinary cultures had both interdisciplinary diversity and intradisciplinary homogeneity. In other words, a particular disciplinary culture must be both different from other disciplinary cultures (interdisciplinary diversity) and have similarities among its members (intradisciplinary homogeneity).

One of the points these definitions have in common is the general issue of being similar in a group in terms of actions, such as having a common genre or genres and a shared understanding of the purpose and form of the genre(s). In Hyland and Swales' definitions, this issue comes along with being a member who has common interests, nomenclature, and practices in a certain community. These members, according to them,

have collective goals, words, actions, and genres and these shared conventions in various practices construct the community.

# 3. Study one

## 3.1. Research questions

The first study serves as an extension of Horowitz (1986) and a replication of Hale et al. (1996), and is an indicator of change in how university faculty use writing to teach and assess content since those studies were conducted. It also expands upon the general analyses of writing assignments in content classes so far. The timing of this study is important to push the area forward because Horowitz (1986) was conducted nearly 20 years ago and Hale et al. (1996) was conducted 10 years ago. To compare the results of these kinds of studies, and in this way, analyze the change in the timeline, such studies should be done periodically.

In addition, prior research in the area of writing assignments in content classes have mainly looked at genre requirements (Horowitz, 1886; Hale et al. 1996; Zhu 2004a, Jackson et al, 2006) and only Hale et al (1996) have investigated cognitive demands of such assignments given in content classes. The present study expands upon these studies and investigates a new construct, prompt format, which has never been looked at before.

The following research questions guided the first part of this study:

1. What genres are required in non-language classes? How do these genres compare to the genres found in Horowitz (1986) and Hale et al. (1996)?

2. What is the level of information processing required in these assignments?

3. What is the most common prompt format used in these assignments?

## 3.2. Method

### 3.2.1. Context

The study was conducted at a large Midwestern research university with a population of nearly 46,000, a total of 36,000 undergraduate and 10,000 graduate and professional at the time of the study. This study includes syllabi and handouts from 14 out of 16 colleges, which helps to maintain a representative sample of writing assignments from different departments.

The research by Horowitz (1986) was conducted at a single university, as well. Hale et al. (1996), however, included assignments from 8 different universities. It included five disciplines from the graduate level and these were business, chemistry, civil engineering, computer science, and psychology. In addition to the undergraduate level courses of these disciplines listed above, they also selected Economics, English, and History.

What differs in the present study was, although the data were collected from a single university, the disciplines were not selected as they were in Hale et al. (1996). Thus, it was intended that data would represent all disciplines. In other words, this study includes more departments represented but only one university.

### 3.2.2. Data collection

For this research, syllabi for content classes were collected. There were two methods of data collection in this research: searching online for publicly available syllabi and assignment handouts and requesting syllabi and handouts which were not online. For publicly available syllabi and handouts, which were collected in the first part of the data collection, I selected three departments from randomly selected colleges. These colleges were College of Arts and Letters, College of Business, College of Natural Science, College of Education, and College of Communication, Art and Sciences. For this stage, I got all syllabi and handouts that were available online. In some cases, I was directed to professors' departmental web pages to download syllabi and handouts. At this point, syllabi and handouts for 176 different courses were collected.

For the publicly unavailable syllabi and handouts, which were collected in the second step of the data collection, the head of departments were contacted via email and asked to forward an email requesting syllabi and handouts from professors. In some cases, if professors taught various classes, they provided me with different syllabi and handouts. Some professors also provided extra information and materials without being asked to do so. These extra materials included more information on expectations, grading sheets, sample essays, guidelines for the assignments, and links to the websites that helped better understand requirements of a particular genre in some disciplines. These materials were also consulted when analyzing and coding the data.

At the end of two steps of data collection, syllabi and handouts from 350 different courses were collected. The distribution of these courses across disciplines is as follows: 111 courses in sciences, 125 courses in social sciences and 114 courses in humanities.

The distribution of syllabi including each discipline, number of departments represented, and number of syllabi is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of syllabi across disciplines

|  | Number of Departments represented | Number of Assignments | Number of Syllabi |
|---|---|---|---|
| Social Sciences | 5 | 196 | 125 |
| Sciences | 4 | 175 | 111 |
| Humanities | 5 | 182 | 114 |
| TOTAL | 14 | 553 | 350 |

This type of data collection was different from Horowitz (1986) and Hale et al. (1996). Horowitz sent a letter to the faculty members of a middle-sized university and got a 5% response rate. Hale et al. (1996) selected five disciplines to be represented at the graduate level (business, chemistry, civil engineering, computer science, and psychology) and eight disciplines to be represented in undergraduate level (the five courses mentioned above and economics, English and history). This replication, however, included a large sample of both publicly available and non-publicly available data.

### 3.2.3. Response rate

For the publicly available data, the data were searched for and collected online. As a result, no response rate is reported. As far as publicly unavailable data is concerned, an e-mail was sent to the head of each department in a large research university. The number of people these heads of departments forwarded that request to was unknown. Thus, the response rate in the present study could only be reported according to the number of departments. Out of 48 different departments, 39 departments responded with various data to be used in the study. Each of these departments sent me at least one syllabus. Nine departments either did not respond, or rejected the request. As a result, the response rate for the data collected via e-mail by department was 81%.

### 3.2.4. Definitions

In this study, a *writing assignment* was defined as any piece of writing requiring more than one or two sentences, which was the definition of an assignment used in Hale et al. (1996). All the assignments collected from content classes were considered to be relevant if they fit this definition.

The second research question, which investigated *cognitive demands* of writing assignments, was investigated only in Hale et al. (1996). The classification scheme for this question was adapted from Hale et al. (1996). This present study was unique in the analysis of the level of information processing these assignments require. Hale et al. (1996) analyzed their cognitive demands, and this analysis was loosely based on Bloom's taxonomy.

Bloom (Bloom B. S., 1956; Krathwohl, D. R., Bloom, B. S., & Bertram, B. M., 1973) suggested six different cognitive levels, each of which could help the educators to

categorize the level of information processing they require in tasks. These levels, summarized in Figure 1, are knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. In this taxonomy, knowledge level requires the learner to remember the information, comprehension involves comprehending the information presented and thus converting and communicating it with new words, application means transferring the new information and using it in new contexts, analysis involves deconstructing the new knowledge, synthesis means reorganizing the data and evaluation requires the learner to provide his/ her judgments.

Figure 1: Bloom's Taxonomy
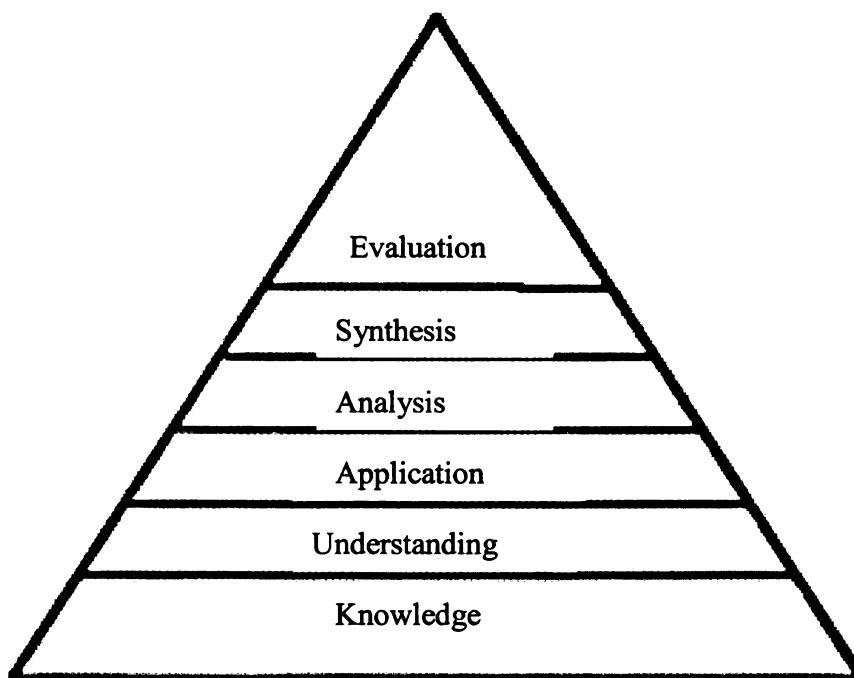


Taken from Southeast Missouri State University (2005). Accessed 2008, January at
<http://cstl.semo.edu/institute/2005Summer/e-excuses/images/bloomstaxonomy.gif >

The third research question, regarding *prompt format*, was investigated only in Hale et al. (1996). The classification scheme for this question was adapted from Kroll and Reid (1994). A summary with the examples given in Kroll and Reid (1994) is included in Table 3. In giving guidelines for designing writing prompts, Kroll and Reid (1994) suggested three different formats: a bare prompt, a framed prompt, and a text based or reading based prompt (p. 232). Bare prompts refer to simple statements and questions explaining the task for the writers. Framed prompts include tasks which provide students with a specific context to interpret and assess its implications. The third type of prompt, a text-based prompt, provides students with either adapted or authentic reading passage to develop ideas according to its content.

Table 3: Prompt Format*

| Bare Prompts | Capital Punishment. Discuss. Write an essay in which you discuss the reasons why you like or do not [...] |
|---|---|
| Framed Prompts | It always strikes me as a terrible shame to see young people spending so much of their time staring at television. If we could unplug all TV sets in America, our children would grow up to be healthier, better educated, and more independent human beings. Do you agree or disagree? Explain and illustrate your answer from your own experience, your observation of others, or your reading (used as a topic on the CUNY Writing Skills Assessment Test, CUNY Task Force on Writing, 1983) |
| Text-based or reading-based prompts | How does Kluckhohn explain the differences and similarities among the world's peoples? What do you think about his views? Use examples from your own experience, reading, or observation in developing your essay. (used on the University of California Subject A exam, 1987, cited by Frodesen, 1991) |

*taken from Kroll and Reid (1995)

### 3.2.5. Analysis

After the data were collected, a random sample of the syllabi and handouts (200 out of 350) was analyzed so that a preliminary descriptive scheme could be developed to categorize the type of writing that students were required to according to a variety of variables.

Content analysis design was used to categorize these assignments collected. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2006), there are two approaches to content analysis. The first is that the researcher determines the categories prior to the actual analysis of the documents whereas in the second type of categorization the researcher categorizes the items after the data collection. In this study, similar to Horowitz (1986) and Hale et al. (1996), the latter type was employed in order to ensure the descriptive nature of the analysis and allow for possible emerging types of assignments.

For the first research question, concerning the genres of the assignments, as their contents were being analyzed, the preliminary categories were modified and new categories were added as they emerged. The modification and development of scheme continued to the end of the analysis. The final list of genres and their descriptions is included in Appendix A. Some examples of genres are also given in Table 4.

Table 4: Some examples of genre

| Genre | Example |
|---|---|
| Self reflection | [...] A daily journal written by the student concerning his/her work at the internship:<br><br>The journal should describe what the student's tasks were for the day and how those tasks were accomplished. This should include important background information, organizational policies and procedures, and the role of colleagues in accomplishing assignments. While the journal may be handwritten, the contents are expected to be of professional quality. This includes correct spelling and proper grammar. |
| Web page | Doublespeak Project<br><br>Choose one example of doublespeak and write an analysis of it. Why is it doublespeak? Whose interests is this language serving? Then make a webpage that features the example and your analysis. This page will be graded on the quality of the doublespeak and the analysis. |

Hale et al. (1996) also employed the same procedure, which included an initial set (110 out of 162), which led to the final categorization with some modifications when necessary. Horowitz, however, having a smaller sample size, categorized the data into two groups as "essay test questions" and "everything else" in the initial analysis of the data. He then classified and analyzed the writing tasks accordingly.

To illustrate the coding in this study, below is an example of an assignment taken from College of Business:

> "Each student will turn in one written case analysis report [...] Your analysis should focus on: (1) identifying the critical problems confronting the employees featured in the cases and why these problems are important to them; (2) approaches to solving these problems; (3) sets of possible solutions; (4) criteria to select solutions from sets of possible solutions; (5) selections of solutions and their limitations; and (6) lessons learned (what you want the employees to learn). [...] (with detailed analyses in appendices)."

In this assignment, the genre is a case study because students are required to analyze a case and write a report on it. In terms of cognitive demands, it is at the evaluation level at Bloom's taxonomy, where students are required to make decisions and supporting views. As far as prompt format is concerned, students required to think of a context for this case, so it is considered to be context based in the present study.

Below is another example of a writing task, taken from College of Arts and Letters:

> In your reading response, you should briefly summarize the reading and also address issues or topics in the reading that interested you or led you to ask questions. You might begin your reading response by asking the following questions: What ideas interest me most? What insights does this reading offer? What issues are involved in this reading? What is at stake where these issues are concerned? What do I agree with in the reading? What do I not agree with? What do I not understand, or need to know more about?

This writing assignment requires students to response to a reading passage, so it is considered to be a reading response in terms of genre. As far as cognitive demands are concerned, it is at the application level where students are required to transfer abstract ideas to practical solutions. Lastly, in terms of prompt format, students are presented with a text to which they must respond or utilize in their writing. Thus, it is reading-based prompt.

### 3.2.6. Interrater reliability

The data were coded by two raters in order to enhance reliability. In each case, two different researchers coded all the data collected focusing on only one question. The second rater was different for each category (i.e. genre, cognitive demands, and prompt formats). The process yielded an interrater reliability percentage of 85% for genre, and 89% for prompt format, and 63% for cognitive demands. This was understandable because the distinction between the categories of the taxonomy was not clear-cut.

The disagreement areas for genre were mainly on the difference between self reflection and reaction papers. The raters could not reach an agreement on the place of interpretation and comments in reaction papers and self reflection. In addition, there were some disagreements regarding *review* as a genre because the category was too broad and included three different kinds of review (i.e., book review, article review, and literature review).

The disagreement areas for prompt formats were mainly on the reading-based prompts. In some cases, the students were required to observe some phenomena and write a paper based on that information. In such cases, although it was not framed, it was not totally reading based, because there was no reading passage required. Thus, there were some disagreement areas in this category.

As far as cognitive demands are concerned, the distinction between application and analysis was the point where the raters disagreed most. The difference between identification of connection in application level and identification of component in analysis level were led to some disagreements between raters. I think Bloom's taxonomy and such educational taxonomies are necessary and useful for categorizing level

questions in educational settings. But as far as research is concerned, it may not be clear cut to identify and reach an agreement on.

## 3.3. Results

### 3.3.1. Research question 1: Genres

For research question 1, addressing the genres required in the assignments in content classes, the results indicated that the distribution varied according to disciplines. Results indicated that, among the out-of-class writing assignments students are required to do in content classes, the most frequent genres were research papers and reaction papers. Figure 2 presents the distribution of genres required in content classes across social sciences, humanities, and sciences. As shown in Figure 2, some genres could be found all 3 groups (e.g. research papers, reaction papers, self reflection, observation, review), whereas some genres could only be found in one or two of them (e.g. lab report, case study analysis, webpage).

Figure 2: Distribution of genres in writing assignments across disciplines
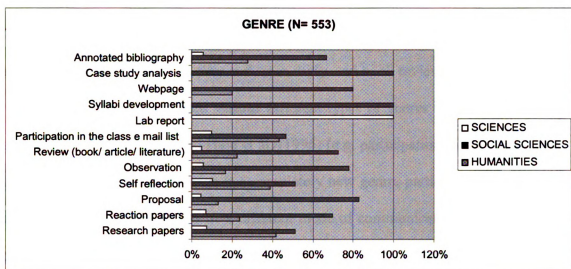


In this figure, N refers to total assignments. As it can be seen in Figure 2, the numbers represent the percentage of the total instances of an assignment with that genre found in each discipline. For example, 100% of the total instances of the genre *case study* were found in the social sciences. Similarly, 100% of the total instances of the genre *lab report* were found in sciences.

These genre types were somewhat different than Horowitz (1986) and Hale et al. (1996). These two earlier studies, assuming that *summary* was a genre as opposed to text type, had investigated *summary* as one of the genres. But the results of the present study did not reveal *summary* as one of the genres required in the assignments. The genre Horowitz (1986) identified as "summary of/ reaction to a reading" was not the same as the *reaction papers* this study reported, because the genre Horowitz analyzed included both summary and reaction, whereas the analysis in this present study did not find any summary in the reaction papers (although a summary is often included in a reaction

paper, even if it is not specified by the assignment). For the reaction papers this study analyzed, students were expected to comment on, considering, but not summarizing, the reading assignments. There were, however, some common genres that could also be found in Hale et al. (1996) (e.g., proposal, case study, and book review).

The analysis also revealed various different types of genres which had not been observed in Horowitz (1986) and Hale et al. (1996) (e.g. participation in the class e-mail list, web page). Although web page is a completely new genre, participation in the class email list might be considered to be a different mode of communication (e.g., a reaction paper that is posted online). On the other hand, there were also some assignments that confirmed the findings of these earlier studies. Despite the differences in context, time and sample size, this might suggest academic writing shows some similarities in various contexts. Considering the descriptive nature of these kinds of studies, the results observed in one study may or may not confirm earlier studies.

A summary of comparison of results regarding genre is given in Table 5. I should also note that a precise comparison is not possible, because of the differences in sample sizes and classification schemes. In general, when compared to Horowitz (1986) and Hale et al. (1996), the most significant findings in the present study were the emergence of new "digital" genres and the increased cognitive demands found in graduate versus undergraduate courses.

Table 5: Comparison of results regarding genre

| Horowitz (1986) | Hale et at. (1996) | The present study |
|---|---|---|
| <ul><li>summaries of or reactions to reading</li><li>annotated bibliographies</li><li>research projects</li><li>reports on a specified participatory experience</li><li>connections between theory and data</li><li>case studies</li><li>syntheses of multiple sources</li></ul> | <ul><li>summary (includes annotated bibliography without comment)</li><li>essay</li><li>library research paper</li><li>report of experiment/ observation without interpretation</li><li>report of experiment/ observation with interpretation</li><li>case study</li><li>book review</li><li>plan/ proposal</li><li>documented computer program</li><li>unstructured writing</li></ul> | <ul><li>research papers</li><li>reaction papers</li><li>proposal</li><li>self reflection</li><li>observation</li><li>review (book/ article/ literature)</li><li>annotated bibliography</li><li>participation in the class e mail list</li><li>case study analysis</li><li>lab report</li><li>syllabi development</li><li>webpage</li></ul> |

### 3.3.2. Research question 2: Cognitive demands

The analyses of cognitive demands were based on both content of the assignment and the verbs used in the prompt. As Figure 3 shows, the most frequent cognitive demand in the distribution of cognitive demands of writing assignments in the undergraduate content classes was *analysis*, whereas the most frequent cognitive demand in the distribution of cognitive demands in the assignments in the graduate level was *evaluation*. The comparative analysis of the cognitive demands according to levels revealed that the assignments requiring comprehension level were observed only at the undergraduate level (100%). Similarly, *application* (97%) and *analysis* (85%) were the two demands that were most frequent in the distribution at the undergraduate level. *Synthesis* (76%) and *evaluation* (80%) were the most frequent in the distribution of cognitive demands in the writing assignments at the graduate level.

Figure 3. Distribution of cognitive demands of writing assignments across disciplines
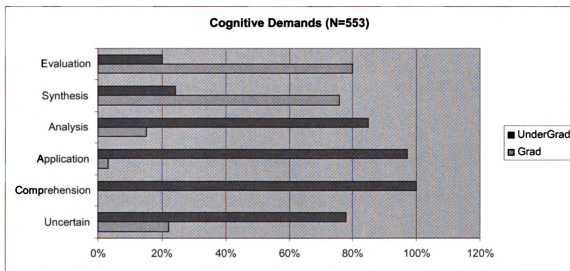
To compare the results with previous studies, the cognitive demands of the writing assignments were only investigated in Hale et al. (1996). The results in that study indicated that among the cognitive demands across disciplines, higher-cognitive demands received the highest percentage in out of class assignments in 1-5 page essays in undergraduate courses (p. 37).

### 3.3.3 Research question 3: Prompt format

For the third research question, regarding prompt format, as Figure 4 shows, text-based prompts (43%) are the most frequent, followed by bare prompts (29%) and framed prompts (26%). In 2% of the cases, the prompt format was not clear. These results added a new dimension to the research studies which this study aimed to expands upon as these have not been investigated in earlier research studies.

Figure 4. Percentages of prompt format in writing assignments
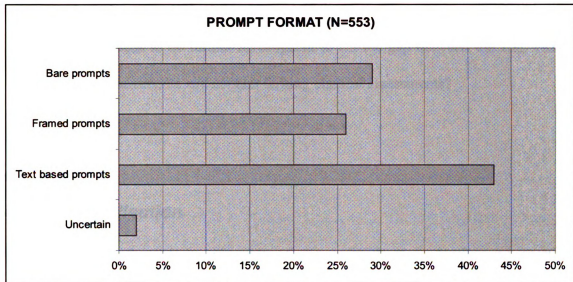


# 4. Study two

## 4.1. Research questions

The second part of the study investigates the common writing assignments in ESL writing classes and the potential impact of information about writing assignments of content classes on ESL classes. In addition, this part further investigates ESL teachers' suggestions for future research.

The following research questions guided the second study:

1. What are the common writing assignments in different levels of ESL writing classes? How do they compare to the findings in the content analysis in the first part of the study?

2. What is the potential impact of knowledge about the writing demands of content classes on ESL classes?

3. What needs to be further investigated to fill the gap between the ESL writing classes/ assessments and content writing classes/ assessments?

## 4.2. Method

### 4.2.1 Data collection

The method used in this part of the research is in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted over two months in 2007. The interviews included open ended and descriptive questions such as "Please explain the types of writing classes that you teach" and "What type(s) of writing assignments are required in your writing courses/ assessments?" to obtain as much information as possible about level(s) the interviewees teach and different practices they employ in these classes. As such, the interviews were reflective in that I tried to let the interviewee take the lead without any interruption. I only probed for the rare cases where the statement needed clarification and expansion. A list of main interview questions appears in Appendix B.

Furthermore, copies of their syllabi, writing assignment handouts, and texts were collected as a means of triangulating the data. These materials were also analyzed to investigate current practices in ESL composition classes at the university level and obtain additional evidence regarding the information suggested by the ESL instructor interviews.

In addition, to investigate the potential impact of the results of studies such as this one, the interviewees were shown the results of the first part of the study and asked to

comment on them in relation to their current practices. They were also asked about the relevance and sufficiency of the information in guiding future practices to determine if and how assignment analyses were useful and relevant.

## 4.2.2. Participants

The participants were 15 English writing teachers in the English programs from 3 Midwestern universities (referred to here as T1, T2, etc.). English language programs in these 3 universities included various levels from the lower level ESL classes to the graduate level ESP classes. Four teachers taught classes in Intensive English Programs (IEP), five teachers taught English for Academic purposes (EAP), and four teachers taught academic writing for international graduate students. Most of the teachers who participated in this study taught different levels of classes in different programs and commented on them. The basic information about the teachers including their gender and level they teach when the interviews were conducted is summarized in Table 6.

Table 6: Participants in ESL teacher interviews

| Teacher | Gender | Level |
|---------|--------|-------|
| T 1 | Female | Graduate level writing/ IEP |
| T 2 | Male | EAP |
| T 3 | Female | Graduate level writing |
| T 4 | Female | Graduate level writing |
| T 5 | Female | Graduate level writing |
| T 6 | Male | IEP/ EAP |
| T 7 | Male | IEP |
| T 8 | Female | EAP |
| T 9 | Female | IEP |
| T 10 | Female | EAP |
| T 11 | Male | EAP |
| T 12 | Female | IEP |
| T 13 | Female | EAP |

## 4.2.3. Analysis

The interviews were all recorded in a digital voice recorder, and then transcribed. Some follow-up emails were also used to clarify some points while the interviews were transcribed. Identified patterns obtained from the interviews were summarized in a chart.

At the end of the interviews, all participants were asked to provide syllabi and writing handouts for the ESL writing classes they teach. In addition to these main required materials, some instructors provided me with extra data such as their grading sheets, general course objectives determined by the curriculum committee, specific guidelines they provide the students with. For the triangulation of data I got from the

interviews, I analyzed these additional materials and summarized them in a chart to see commonalities and differences from the interviews.

## 4.3. Results

### 4.3.1. The effect of proficiency level

Results revealed that the goals and requirements in ESL writing classes varied greatly according to the level. A number of interviewees taught different levels at the time of interviews so they explicitly made the comparison between different goals in the classes they taught. For instance, one Intensive English Program teacher underlined different requirements depending on various reasons:

> T 9: Usually the assignment is not purely isolated but connected to the activities we have done in the class. It depends on the learning goals and activities, class activities that are associated with the assignment. Usually there are classroom activities that have been leading up to the writing assignment. The writing assignment is a combination of this particular learning activity.

Other teachers, while accepting the differences in requirements in different classes, remarked that in various levels of English, students have different skills. As such, the requirements and expectations vary according to skill students have at specific level(s). For instance, one teacher asserted that their expectations and prompts differ at different levels:

> T 7: [in lower levels] Our assignments usually come from the context of the chapter that we are studying. My prompts are not long to keep it simple for them to understand. Higher levels, I give them more because I expect more. [...]They will have to use the reading to support their ideas. But as far as writing a response- that's an EAP level skill.[...]

Some of the interviewees also mentioned different requirements during the same semester. For instance, one teacher commented that they started with the basic of the five paragraph essay and built on it during the semester.

> T 11: It varies. I don't have a very strict curriculum. Usually I start with paragraphs.

As such, it is generally accepted that goals and assignments given in ESL classes vary greatly due to the time they are assigned and level of students.

## 4.3.2 Focus on the basics

Depending on the level teachers teach at English language programs, the classes are more focused on the basics (e.g., organization, citation, etc). In other words, ESL teachers do not seem to pay much attention to genre, except perhaps at the graduate level. For instance, lower level students were expected to present their writing skills in short essays or paragraphs:

> T 10: For the lower level classes there are much shorter essays. We start with paragraphs.[...] The topics are less interesting because I don't want them to write so much at the beginning level.

Another teacher also commented that at these lower levels, students were getting the basics even at the sentence level so as to be able to express their thoughts in their future academic career. At this level, one teacher even rejects the employment of academic conventions as taking away a student's voice:

> T 7: I assume that they [the students] need to be able to write clear sentences and paragraphs and explain something in their future careers.[...] I would be more concerned to see their own voice then the rigid academic requirements.

At higher levels in English for Academic purposes, where students are one or two semester away from their academic degrees, academic writing conventions such as organization and plagiarism become the key goals of the classes. For example one teacher remarked the importance of using academic language and formatting papers at this level:

> T 12: They need to know how to format a paper[...]. They also need to learn how to research topics and cite sources. At this level, at first I look for content but then for the second draft I concentrate a little bit on grammar. They should be using academic language, because, you know, it is an academic essay, but, then something like cause and effect essay needs to be very academic.

At this level, some teachers indicated that the students had the basic skills in language and they needed to develop skills to demonstrate their ability in academic writing in English. As these courses were more academic-oriented than basic ESL writing courses, teachers argued that it was important to better prepare the students for the writing conventions as much as students needed. For instance, one teacher reported that they tried to construct their classes in the way that they could address their students' needs at this level:

> T 6: What I have found out what they really need the most is working developing citation methods. That's the one thing they have been asking me about the most. Other than that, the things that we are doing directly apply to their academic life. I am trying to model the class after what they'll need.

Another EAP teacher commented that students also need some exposure of non salient grammatical structures in their second language to be able to write well in their academic classes.

> T 2: [My role] is partly showing them how far they have to go. I mean the difference between the writing they are doing and the kind of writing that will be expected of them. That's very important they understand the kind of writing that they will be doing but they can't do them yet. I think that it is very important to supply them with the academic grammar and vocabulary because they are non salient, they don't exist in conversation.

In graduate level courses, students were more exposed to academic conventions. The interviewees teaching these graduate-level writing courses focused on the types of writing these international scholars and graduate students were expected to do in their academic programs. One writing teacher commented that academic conventions are important part of academic writing because misuse of conventions identified non-native writers as such, and hindered comprehension of their writing:

> T 1: We don't impose the conventions on them, but we do lay it down for them because that's what they need and what they want. I think often other writing teachers forget the fact that these people are not weak writers; they are very strong writers in their own language. But they are perceived as being weak because English is a second language for them and secondly, because they don't know the conventions. Sometimes they do things that are so counter to the academic conventions here in the western world that they come off looking weak. Once they learn those conventions and internalize them, then we realize that they have got these great arguments. So, in a way, in the beginning, because I am teaching one of the most basic graduate courses, I almost feel like it is necessary to almost over teach the conventions in the beginning.

Similarly, another teacher indicated that, in a graduate level writing class, although students all came from different departments and backgrounds, the common goal of the course was to help them get the mastery of academic conventions:

> T 3: Their goals are in a sense to understand sort of the academic forms in their context and work on sort of understanding in this system especially like citations and not plagiarizing.

These graduate level classes were more tailored to the needs of the students and the assignments are given accordingly. The intent was to help them to be able to write better especially for the writing the students undertake for their program. As one teacher put in the syllabus of the course, one aim of such courses was to develop the students' ability to be able to deal with complexity of academic genres such as scholarly publications, theses, and dissertations. These courses dealt with different components of such genres, but most

of the times, on a case by case basis. One teacher explained how tailored teaching writing at this level by giving an example from a thesis writing class:

> T 5: In [this] class, it is supposed to be a thesis writing class, so we look at the different part of the thesis from acknowledgments to all the way through discussion sections and literature reviews, evaluating scholarship, things like that. But it is all focused on the writing that they are doing.

As such, specific needs of the students were addressed throughout the course. Having a diverse population from different departments, it was a complex task to develop materials and provide assistance with the specific writing samples. Most of the times, the goals of such courses were set at the beginning of the semester. One instructor reported this initial process as follows:

> T 5: They are pretty clear about what they are doing in terms of writing. They tell me. I always collect at the very beginning of the semester what writing tasks they have ahead of them. [...]Because if students are not doing certain things, there is no point in wasting your time on it.

> In sum, most ESL teachers seem to focus on basic skills when teaching ESL

writing.

## 4.3.3 The potential impact of knowledge about the writing demands of content classes on ESL classes

### 4.3.3.1 Practical considerations

Although recent studies have observed writing assignment types required in content classes, no studies to date have examined the impact of these content analyses on actual ESL teaching. In order to investigate this issue, I showed ESL writing teachers the result tables of the first part of the study. While many teachers found these results

interesting, for most of them, the main problem was basic writing skills at the lower levels. For instance, two teachers commented that the basic writing classes they taught, the results of research on content classes would seem to have little or no immediate impact on their teaching.

> T 1: [It would not impact] the course I am teaching. [...]If we were to create different courses with different objectives in mind, then bringing in this kind of data when we do the course planning process, yeah, I think there would be things to use here. Some of the trends and practices in teaching writing may need to consider more maybe genres, more aspects of writing in the everyday academic life.

> T 12: I would not really change my teaching. But if I were to teach another level, I would probably make sure that they did probably more academic type of papers where you cite sources and research more but the level I teach we don't really concentrate on that stuff [genre].

Interviewees who taught EAP classes commented that it would impact their way of teaching but they expressed their concerns about textbook activities. The following quote reflects one EAP teacher's concerns about the activities in the ESL writing textbook they used.

> T 2: First of all, this is very valuable. There is a lack of this kind of data. It is interesting that there are very few short assignments [in the content classes]. That's important because a lot of the textbooks, ESL textbooks, don't get beyond the short assignments. You know, they'll be teaching paragraph still in level 3, which is clearly an absurdity.

Some teachers commented that this would impact their teaching, but they need more information about the requirements of specific genres:

> T 6: I think I would consider the lab report's being so prevalent. If half of my students are doing that as their primary type of writing, I guess I would consider it although I am not really sure how to teach that. So I would have to learn that. That does interest me.

T 13: I think the thing that would immediately impact on what I am doing would be this: Participation in the email. Because when I receive emails from students, they are often kind of unconventional. [But] I guess it would be helpful to know what a lab report looks like.

It seems that the potential impact of knowledge about the writing demands of content classes on actual teaching would be more visible and practical at higher levels of ESL teaching. For instance, writing teachers at the graduate level acknowledged that such analyses were useful for them. One teacher even commented that teachers should also be doing such analyses:

T 5: It is nice to have studies but that does not mean I am not responsible for keeping in touch with my own community, so I think everybody needs to keep in touch with their immediate community[e.g. in the same school].

### 4.3.3.2. The importance of genre

In some rare cases, some interviewees had some graduate students only from one specific department. In these cases, they were interested to see the content analysis and implement the results in their teaching. For instance, one teacher commented that it was important to tailor their teaching at the graduate level:

T 4: To have a corpus of papers that we could take a look at for analysis and be able to see may be something that we might be able to add to the course that would address their needs. What is also interesting is looking at some of the differences and seeing how we can tailor our teaching to the specific department.

Some teachers suggested that academic writing itself required more considerations than academic forms. The following quotation reflects one teacher's concern about current ESL practices and textbooks:

T 5: I think we need to throw out these rhetoric books. We need to start looking at the competencies and skills rather than forms and conventions. Any idiot can write book that talks about thesis statements, compare and contrast essays...And the fact that every ESL writing book is the same. I mean, go and read them.[...] The even end up copying each other, it is quite funny.

Most of the teachers agreed on the importance of genres in teaching in general, but the way they taught genres might be different. For ESL teachers, providing the students with the skills to deal with the academic genres became of primary importance. For instance, one teacher suggested that it was important to teach core skills that may help to write these academic forms.

T 13: It is obvious that different kinds of writing is used in different contexts, in society in large and also in different kinds of classes. And a strong writer is the one who can write in a variety of contexts. There are core writing skills that are needed in all kinds of writing. It is important for students to develop those core writing skills. It is also important for students to develop familiarity with perhaps the most commonly used writing conventions or writing assignments that are used in the university. So essentially you work on core skills that all writers need and then you work on common academic forms.

To summarize, according to the level and context, the importance of genre required in writing assignments differ. In graduate level writing classes, however, teaching becomes more tailored and the importance of genre is visible.

## 4.3.4 ESL writing teachers' suggestions for further research

For question 3 of the second study, teachers were asked to suggest areas that needed to be investigated more to address the discrepancy between ESL classes and content classes. As such, I wanted to address the specific needs and interests of the stakeholders, the ESL writing instructors. The results are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7: Questions suggested by ESL writing instructors

| Questions for assignments | • What kinds of writing assignments content professors are giving? |
|---|---|
| | • How much reading students are required to do? |
| | • How much writing students are required to do? |
| | • What are the types of sources students read? Are they reading highly philosophical stuff that probably difficult for native speakers to understand, or are they reading kind of technical sort of things? |
| | • What do content professors usually use in the wording of the prompts for the assignments (e.g. a question, a statement, or a specific context, guidelines of your expectations, or student choice)? |
| | • What is the main genre required in content courses? What does it look like? Like what are the guidelines for a lab report? |
| | • How much language students have to use? Are assignments writing like coherent paragraphs or are they writing like 2-3 sentences for each question. |

Table 7 Continued:

| | |
|---|---|
| Questions for evaluation | • What is professors' grading policy?<br><br>• How do professors respond to writing assignments they give for content classess?<br><br>• What do professors value? (i.e., Coherency of an article, linguistic competence as grammatically correct, the use of vocabulary related to the area)<br><br>• What do professors look for when they read a paper?<br><br>• Do professors judge ESL students' papers differently than NS'?<br><br>• What kinds of mistakes do professors focus on most?<br><br>• What is the best way to linguistically evaluate a student's writing?<br><br>• What do the professors consider the minimal skills that students need to be able to do this?<br><br>• Where do professors think the gaps are considering the students coming out of the ESL programs? In other words, what are the biggest gaps professors perceive in ESL students' writing assignments?<br><br>• What do professors think that helps students most to improve their writing?<br><br>• What are the issues content professors are dealing with in ESL students' writing? |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Where are ESL students' weaknesses?<br><br>• How do content professors define plagiarism?<br><br>• What do content professors do when they think they see plagiarism when they are looking at their students' work?<br><br>• How often do content professors think they see plagiarism in ESL students' writing? |
| Questions about required students' skills and needs | • What are the basic skills students need in order to be able to handle that kind of writing assigned in content classes?<br><br>• What do students need to complete the assignments?<br><br>• What is a good writer doing with the content?<br><br>• What content skills do ESL students need?<br><br>• What organizational tools do ESL students need?<br><br>• What language tools in terms of vocabulary and grammar in particular are in assignments?<br><br>• Where do professors think that students need more preparation?<br><br>• What are the writing skills to be able to fulfill whatever assignments in this class?<br><br>• What types of skills do ESL students need to develop before taking content classes? |

Table 7 continued

| | |
|---|---|
| | • What do content classes demand and how can ESL teachers help develop those skills?<br><br>• What do content professors think ESL students' needs are to complete assignments?<br><br>• Do professors receive emails that are pragmatically incorrect? How do they deal with those emails? |

Most ESL writing teachers wanted to get more information on the specifics of assignments required in content classes. These included the amount of reading and writing students are required, and the type of sources they read to obtain information in their content areas. Some teachers commented that specifications regarding some genres were even unknown to them. For instance, one teacher suggested that they needed for some more specific information about the requirements of the specific genres required in content classes:

> T 13: ESL teachers are generally more literature focused or they are language people. So I think we tend to teach more based on more social sciences or humanities than sciences. So the biggest thing for me is to know what a lab report looks like and how we could help students write those well. Like what are the guidelines for a lab report? How much language they have to use? Are they writing like coherent paragraphs or are they writing like 2-3 sentences for each question.

Some of the questions raised in these teacher interviews dealt with evaluation in content areas. ESL writing teachers wanted to know more about questions in textbooks,

content professors' grading policy, their feedback in writing assignments, their focus when grading the assignments, and issues content professors dealt with in ESL students' writing assignments.

> T 12: May be seeing some of the textbooks that they use and then looking at what kinds of questions are being asked in the textbooks and then you know what types of writing assignments they are getting and what they're required to write. How they require formatting the papers and what kinds of style they require? I would just ask them what kinds of writing assignments they are giving and how much reading the students are required to do and then how much writing they are required to do. I would also ask the professor may be what their grading policy is. What they look for when they read a paper and then judge ESL students' papers differently than NS'. What kinds of mistakes do they focus on most?

ESL teachers also wanted to obtain more information about the possible application of the material ESL students have been exposed to ESL writing classes. For them, it was important to see how much the information students get out of these ESL classes. For instance, one instructor suggested that future studies address the applications of the information presented in ESL writing classes to academic and professional life.

> T 12: I am curious to learn how much they got out of these writing courses. Whether what they were taught in their first year of their PhD program paid off at some point? Does the stuff they learnt, you know, get carried over in their academic professional life? Did it have no effect whatsoever? (laughs) Do they seek writing help even on the job? I am interested about that transition between, you know, the school and professional life and how that teaching of writing that they have received during school pays off either at the end of their academic career or even carrying over into their professional career.

The interviewees also expressed their concern about the required skills and needs in order to complete the assignments required in non-language classes. They wanted to know more about the skills content classes demand so that they could help to develop those skills in ESL classes. For instance, one teacher pointed out that they were aware

that there were some basic skills needed, but they needed to know what language tools and minimal skills are required in particular:

> T 2: So I guess the question for me is "what do the professors consider the minimal skills that students need to be able to do this?" Because, obviously, you know, if I am teaching, I don't know, a class where there is a case study analysis, I am going to teach them what I expect from a case study, what I am not going to do is teach them how to write a paragraph (laughs). That's why I am saying that some of these is course-specific or genre specific. That is the kind of thing I would expect the academic professors to be teaching. What I need to know from curriculum point of view is what basic skills students need in order to be able to handle that kind of writing.

One of the questions suggested by the ESL teachers dealt with ESL student strategies. To be able to prepare ESL students for the range of vocabulary and difficulty of the reading texts students would be required to read in content classes, they wanted to more information about the strategies ESL students use in approaching these kinds of assignments.

> T 9: The hugest gap is going to be the vocabulary range in the university classes. The difficulty of the text they are reading is a big jump.[...] What strategies do our students have in approaching those kinds of texts?

# 5. Discussion

In the light of the results noted above, there are noteworthy implications for pedagogy, assessment and research in the area of second language writing. The issue of how students learn L2 writing has been discussed widely in research studies, the implications of which have been considered to help to gain some insight about teaching and researching L2 writing. In the literature, the distinction between content and ESL classes and possible applications in teaching ESL writing according to what is required in content classes or general requirements in rhetoric and ESL writing sources has been widely discussed (e.g. Benesch, 1995, 2001). Some studies have also looked at teaching practices in ESL classes (Spack 1988, 1993). Spack's ideas about teaching basic skills rather than specific genres seem to be similar to those expressed by some of the teachers interviewed in this study. During the interviews, most ESL teachers commented that they needed more information on *genre*. Genre as a concept was new to some of them, and it was an area they did not know, and consequently, did not teach. Most ESL teachers participated in this study commented that they focused on basic writing skills so that ESL students could express their thoughts in future. As such, the ESL teacher interviews supported Spack's ideas on ESL teaching.

This study, however, does not imply that ESL writing teachers should mimic what is being done in content classes. In contrast, as a descriptive study, this study reported an analysis of the nature of writing assignments given in content classes and analyzed the impact of such analyses on actual ESL teaching. The pedagogical implications could guide ESL writing teachers to implement some features in ESL writing curricula so as to

help their students to develop academic writing skills and understanding of genre requirements in academic programs.

In this section, findings regarding the use of technology in writing assignments, cognitive levels in writing assignments, genre based teaching and assessment and prompt formats and their possible influences will be discussed.

## 5.1 The use of technology

One important finding from this study is that there was an effect of new technology in the assignments analyzed given in content classes. Horowitz (1986) and Hale et al. (1996) did not report digital writing or the use of technology in writing assignments. As such, the use of technology might be interpreted as a new trend in writing assignments. Both digital writing (e.g., web pages) as a newly-emerged genre and participation in the class e-mail list as opposed to traditional mode for reaction papers suggested that technology had a robust impact on the writing assignments required in content classes. Some of these assignments required students to create websites with a specific content and a great majority of them required the students to complete assignments using word processing or specific programs to create web pages. Most of them did not specify programs to help create these web pages or mention teaching students how to create web sites.

Digital writing, as a new finding in the area of L2 writing, has different requirements in order to complete. It can even be considered as another kind of literacy in digital age. Unfortunately, not everyone is informed about how to create web pages, or blogs. Using digital and graphical displays in a digital environment with hyperlinks and creating materials accordingly is a different mode and genre in terms of communication.

As has been said earlier, it is necessary that learners be equipped with necessary information and tools to complete such tasks in a digital environment.

With regard to this kind of digital literacy, which may well be present in some ESL and EFL settings abroad, teachers should be aware of digital literacy to familiarize students with up-to-date practices. ESL writing teachers can implement activities including, but not limited to, use of e-mail discussion as a way not only to teach students to express their opinions in a pragmatically-correct style, but also to create a technologically-communicative learning environment which can help learners to prepare for their future life practices. Also, one may even consider whether the purposes of genres such as emails and web pages used as instructional genres are the same as purposes of e-mails and web pages used in professional life. After all, it is the purpose, not the label, which determines the genre. But ESL teachers may use them as a tool to use their content, which is language.

## 5.2. Cognitive levels of writing assignments

This study reported a range of cognitive levels depending on the level of the students (e.g., undergraduate vs. graduate). Weigle (2002) has suggested that one of the task variables in creating a writing task is the cognitive demand the writing task requires. Considering the importance of writing skills in academic settings, teachers of English, especially at the graduate level in ESL and EFL settings, should take into account the level of information processing they require in writing assignments. When preparing ESL writing curriculum and materials for in-class practice they should consider the cognitive

demands required in undergraduate and graduate level courses in universities and prepare the materials accordingly.

A consideration of cognitive demands is also important in assessment. Hamp-Lyons (2003) has suggested that what is ignored in creating writing test prompts was authenticity, which could be a result of the nature of test situation. She further suggests that the authenticity could be added with the help of "elaborated prompts", although this might also result in some scoring problems in high-stakes testing (2003, p. 172). Thus, writing assessors must prepare writing prompts appropriate to the students' level in order to ensure the reliability and validity of their tests. As such, the results regarding both cognitive level and genres may help writing assessors to create authentic prompts.

## 5.3. Genre based teaching and assessment

This study reported a comparative analysis across disciplines, which could also be helpful for implementation of genre-based teaching in writing classes. Hyland (2004) stated that comparison of the use of genres across disciplines might help the students to develop critical understanding of genres. As such, these findings could also help teachers to create genre-based tasks in writing classes.

Underlining the importance of assessing what students have learned, Hyland (2004) noted that genre-based assessment could help to ensure the possible integration of assessment and instruction in genre-based writing programs. He added that genre-based assessment could ensure both the authenticity and relevancy of writing assignments, which may help to create real-life learning and assessing situations. Considering the main

inquiry of what to assess in students' writing, the findings of the present study may give some insight to create new rubrics for genre-based assessment.

The results of this study indicated that there are some genres that overlap between disciplines. For instance, annotated bibliography and case study analysis could be found in both sciences and humanities. Similarly, proposal, and webpage were observed in social sciences and humanities. Considering these common features between disciplines, ESL writing teachers can come up with syllabi that are tailored according to their students' needs. As Belcher (2006) noted ESP teachers were firstly "needs assessors" (p. 135). As such, this study may also guide ESP teachers to do needs analysis because this is a preliminary step to teach ESP students who have special needs depending on their disciplines.

Genre-based investigations in the graduate level and the issue of teaching writing to graduate students accordingly has been employed broadly (Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988; Biggs et al., 1999; Li, 2006, 2007; Lonka, 2003; Taillefer, 2007). The interviews in the second part of the study also confirmed that there was an impact of the information on the writing demands of content classes on graduate level writing classes. As such, the findings of the first part of the study may have some implications for teaching academic writing for graduate students. Considering that genre-based teaching would help the students to get used to the conventions of scholarly writing, ESL writing teachers who teach graduate level writing courses should consider particular genres especially when they primarily teach graduate writing courses.

The results of this study may also help to develop ESL writing programs. It might include discipline-related genres and thus meet their students' needs with authentic and

realistic writing assignments rather than a traditional approach to teaching ESL writing, such as five paragraph essays. This could not only help the teachers to prepare their students for academic programs, but also bridge the gap between the ESL writing class and content classes because such assignments can address real-world needs of the students.

This kind of needs assessment becomes more complex when the differences among multilingual and multicultural students are taken into account. Johns (2001) acknowledged that in preparing students from diverse backgrounds for the "foreign, sometimes hostile, academic culture", their academic and personal needs should be considered (p. 35). She added that genre theory could be adapted to their level and be employed to improve their knowledge of academic texts and conventions. Thus, depending on their students' level and needs, teachers should be aware of some writing practices and assessment which may lead to a possible development of the students' understanding of academic genres.

## 5.4. Prompt formats and their possible influences

In addition, the results of this study confirmed that test developers needed to take a number of variables into consideration when preparing writing prompts. Brossel (1986), when proposing some unanswered questions and research implications for future research in the field of writing assessment, indicated that there were some studies that have been conducted to shed light in the area. For him, the wording of writing prompt and its effect on the writers' understanding of the topic and as a result performance in writing tests were unknown. Similarly, in a more recent study, Weigle (2002) suggested that one of

the dimensions of the direct writing assessment was the "prompt wording", which corresponded "prompt format" in Kroll and Reid (1994).

According to Weigle (2002), this variable could affect the writing performance and a writing assessment might include stimulus material depending on several factors, the most important being "the role of topical knowledge in the construct definition" (2002, p. 92). This can be understandable, because a certain type of prompt in a writing assignment, as a result of including or not including some stimulus material, requires different levels of information processing on the part of the writer. This point also adds another dimension of the considerations in designing writing tasks.

Moreover, it should be taken into consideration that some structures in the wording of the prompts and the amount of information the writer is provided may also affect other variables such as the background knowledge the writer brings into the writing process or the schema activated as a result of the presented information in the prompt format. Douglas (2000) specified two types of data provided in prompts, namely "contextual material", which provided information about specific features of information, and "input data", which included "visual and/or aural material to be processed" (p. 55f). Clearly, these two different data can affect the writers' performance and the results of the writing assessment accordingly.

The results of the first study suggested that prompts based on a reading passage were the most common format used in content classes. The writing tasks in most content classes analyzed in this study required learners to reflect on or react to a passage about the area they specialized in, or, in some specific cases, they required learners to write a passage about what they had seen or heard in their observation assignments related to

their areas of studies. As such, the students were required to write a passage having a reference in their minds, which, in some ways, integrated multiple skills.

Calfee and Miller (2007) noted the importance of the implementation of a reading passage in preparing writing tasks because, in that case, "comprehension and composition become interwoven" (p. 278). Text-based prompts may also serve an assessor's two primary goals: validity and reliability. This type of integration of skills in a writing task can be observed in the next generation TOEFL® (Test of English as a Foreign Language). The TOEFL® iBT integrates reading and listening with the writing task, which requires students write about a topic on which they have read a passage and listened to a brief lecture. This approach is very authentic, because students in real life students must read texts and listen to lectures and discussions in order to succeed as writers in content-based courses. Writing teachers and assessors should take this new trend of the integration of different skills when preparing text-based writing prompts in order to design well-developed and authentic tasks.

On the other hand, when preparing such integrated writing tasks, test developers should take the population being tested into consideration. Williams (2005) rightly noted that, in creating integrated tasks, choosing a topic may also be tricky, because specific topics chosen for a reading passage and topics used in writing prompts may give an advantage to specific groups if it addresses a certain discipline. To counteract the prior knowledge, test developers generally select topics that focus on little-known details of easily accessible topics.

However, Hayes (2000) acknowledged that although a reading passage may help the writers to be familiar with the content they can get from a source text, the passage

could also affect the representation of the topic discussed, a representation of the writer's persona, and a representation of the text as a spatial display. Thus, especially when assessing these text-based writing assignments, assessors should take these points into consideration.

# 6. Directions for future research

Concerning the implications for future studies, the first part of this study expands upon Horowitz (1986) who called for future studies to build on the beginning which he attempted to give some insight and answers to the unknown nature of writing assignments. It is necessary to replicate these types of studies in order to investigate the changes in the nature of the writing assignments in time. Future studies may address some other genres or features of writing assignments that may emerge over time.

As far as implications for future research studies are concerned, there is also the question of whether we should limit ourselves to what the community labels as a *genre* or whether we can categorize something as a distinct genre even though the community may not have a label for it. I tried to remain as objective as possible, firstly because I, having an etic perspective, do not see myself as the authority to interfere with and change the genres that professors had labeled already. Secondly, this analysis may show the insiders' perspective to the outsiders, who are in this very specific case, ESL teachers. This type of emic perspective may help us to understand how to better prepare ESL students for their prospective academic studies in these departments.

Regarding the guidelines for writing teachers and/or assessors, Hedgcock (2005) concluded that, except for a limited number of research, "[T]he L2 literature offers a dearth of extensive discussion of, and explicit guidelines for, the practices and processes of *teaching* L2 writing" (p. 609). This study only reported the assignments in content classes and their impact on actual ESL writing and testing. More research should be done to shed light in the area of second language writing with more guidelines for ESL teachers. In the ESL teachers' suggestions for future research studies, this issue was frequently brought up. The results of the second part of this study suggested that future research studies may address this issue providing L2 writing teachers with more specific information and guidelines.

Moreover, regarding the prompt format, as Calfee and Miller (2007) state, "The *prompt* sets the stage for the writing task. Rather amazingly, there is relatively little research on how variation in prompt design affects the quality of student writing [...]" (p.276). The present study only analyzed the prompt formats of the assignments given on content classes. Thus, future research studies may investigate the relationship between the prompt design and the quality of writing.

As shown in Table 7, this study revealed some directions for further research based on ESL teachers' interviews. Future studies may address the questions ESL writing teachers suggested in the second part of this study. Future research may also include interviews with a subset of university faculty to obtain additional information suggested by the ESL instructor interviews. Longitudinal studies of ESL student's writing experiences in content classes are also necessary. These studies are expected to provide more insight into assessing and teaching ESL writing in the U.S. and abroad.

# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX A:

# Definitions of Different Genres Observed in the Analysis

Below is the different genres found in the assignments with brief explanations:

*Research paper*: The research paper category referred to any writing assignment which required students to investigate a selected topic or a topic of their own choices.

*Reaction paper*: Assignments given as reaction papers required students to respond to a reading assignment.

*Self reflection*: This genre required students to reflect their own process or learning or writing in general.

*Proposal*: Proposal category was defined as any assignment which asked students to identify some topics, questions, and research methods to investigate a particular phenomenon.

*Observation*: This particular assignment required a reflection of a particular activity they have observed. This type both included observation with comments and observation without comment assignments.

*Review (Book/ Article/ Literature)*: This genre called for a close reading of a particular book, article or literature on a particular topic.

*Participation in the class e-mail list*: This genre required students to participate actively in class e-mailserv. This assignments required students to post a certain number of response weekly.

*Lab report*: This genre required students to describe their findings and describe their significance of a scientific research they have experimented.

*Syllabi development*: This genre gave the students the opportunity to develop a syllabus for a course they intend to teach.

*Web page*: Assignments in this category required students to build web pages on a particular topic following some instructions on digital writing.

*Case study analysis*: This genre included assignments that called for a detailed investigation of a single case or phenomena.

*Annotated bibliography*: Assignments in this category called for brief and descriptive annotations for a review of literature on a particular topic.

*No out of class assignment*: This category included classes which required only in class writing assignments.

# APPENDIX B: Interview Guide for Study Two

1. Please explain the types of writing classes that you teach.

   a. Who are the students and what are their goals?

2. What type(s) of writing assignments are required in your writing courses/ assessments?

   a. Does your textbook require students a certain genre?

   b. Do the assignments you give require a certain genre?

   c. Do the assignments you give a certain transcription mode or is it up to the student?

   d. Can you explain the level of cognitive skills in your assignments (for example organize, analyze, etc.)?

   e. What is the common length of the product these assignments require?

   f. What do you usually use in the wording of the prompts for the assignments (e.g. a question, a statement, or a specific context, guidelines of your expectations, or student choice)?

3. What do you think your students' needs are outside the class? How does that influence your teaching philosophy?

4. [At this point in the interview, I will show them the tables showing the results of the first part of the study] These are the results of the data that I have collected in the first part of the study. What is your general opinion of these results?

5. Having seen these results, would it influence your teaching? If yes, in what way?

6. What do you think we, as researchers, need to investigate to fill in the gap between the ESL writing classes/ assessments and content writing classes/ assessments? In other words, what you want to know about the demands of academic writing in university content classes that you don't yet know?

7. Having seen the results, do you think these might influence your current practices? If yes, in what way?

8. What do you think your role as an ESL writing teacher/ assessor is in meeting your students' needs outside of the ESL classroom?

9. Is there anything that I did not ask but you would like to add?

**APPENDIX C: Recruiting Advertisement for Study One**

Dear (Chair's name):

My name is Nur Yigitoglu and I am a Fulbright Scholar completing my MA in the Department of Linguistics & Germanic, Slavic, Asian, & African Languages at MSU. For my MA thesis, I am examining the types of writing that undergraduate and graduate students at a US university are required to do. The purpose of this research is to better prepare ESL students abroad and in the US for academic writing tasks. I have been able to access a number of syllabi online, but to obtain a better representational sample of syllabi, I would like to examine syllabi and writing assignments that are not posted on departmental web sites. As such, I am hoping to access syllabi and handouts that are available on Angel or from your instructors. Would you be willing to forward the email below to all your instructors (TAs, lecturers, and professors)? I would appreciate it if you would let me know if you would let me know one way or another if you are willing to do this. Thank you for your help.

Nur Yigitoglu
Fulbright Scholar, MA Student
Department of Linguistics & Germanic, Slavic, Asian, & African Languages

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Dear Instructors and Professors:

My name is Nur Yigitoglu and I am a Fulbright Scholar completing my MA in the Department of Linguistics & Germanic, Slavic, Asian, & African Languages at MSU. For my MA thesis, I am examining the types of writing that undergraduate and graduate students at a US university are required to do. The purpose of this research is to better prepare ESL students abroad and in the US for academic writing tasks. I have been able to access a number of syllabi online, but to obtain a better representational sample of syllabi, I would like to examine syllabi and writing assignments that are not posted on departmental web sites as well. I am asking your help in allowing me to access your Angel web site. If you do not want me to access your Angel web site, I would appreciate it if you could send a copy of your syllabus and any handouts about specific assignments to me at: yigitogl@msu.edu. If you add me to your Angel web site, I will receive an email confirmation and you do not need to respond to this email. If you don't want to allow me access, I would appreciate it if you would let me know.

This research was approved as "exempt" by the MSU Internal Review Board. Please be aware that by adding me to your Angel web site or sending me your syllabus, you are consenting for your syllabus to be examined for the purposes stated above. No information about you or your course individually will be reported in my thesis or any resulting publications; results will be reported only by department.

If you would like more information, please email me. In addition, you are welcome to email at the end of the semester, for preliminary results, or next spring, when I will have completed the thesis, for the final results.

Thank you for your help in this matter.

Nur Yigitoglu
Fulbright Scholar, MA Student
Department of Linguistics & Germanic, Slavic, Asian, & African Languages

**APPENDIX D: Letter of Informed Consent for Study Two**

# CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY
## MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

### University academic writing tasks and
### their possible influence on ESL writing curricula and assessment
### INSTRUCTOR

## PURPOSE

You are being asked to participate in a research study that investigates the impact of the writing assignments given in content classes on ESL teaching and assessment. Specifically, we hope to learn about the relevance and sufficiency of the information in guiding future practices to determine if and how assignment analyses are useful and relevant.

## PROCEDURE

If you decide to participate, your interview will be audio-taped. During the interview, you will be interviewed about your current practices as an ESL writing teacher and/ or assessor. You will be shown the results regarding writing assignments in content classes and be asked to comment on them in relation to your current practices. You will be asked about the relevance and sufficiency of the information in guiding future practices to determine if and how assignment analyses are useful and relevant. In addition, I ask that you share with me your syllabi and any copies of writing assignments that you have.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. All data gathered from this study will remain confidential, including participants' names. As a participant, you will not be identifiable in any report of research findings. Only the researchers will have access to the data collected. The audio tapes will not be used for any other purposes or shown to anyone else. They will be kept for five years after publication of any related studies and then destroyed.

For the compensation of your time you spend for this interview, you will be given a $10 gift card.

Your participation is voluntary; you may refuse to answer any questions, or give me any documents and withdraw your consent and leave the study at any time.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact the researchers (Charlene Polio: A714 Wells Hall, polio@msu.edu or Nur Yigitoglu yigitogl@msu.edu ). If you

have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact—anonymously, if you wish— **Peter Vasilenko** - Director, Human Research Protection Program  Phone: (517)355-2180 ext. 239 Email: irbchair@ores.msu.edu , or regular mail: 202 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI, 48824.

Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this study.

_____          Date_____

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