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**UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND
SCHOOL OF LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDIES**

**Assessment Practices in a First Year Academic Writing Module
at the University of the Witwatersrand and the National
University of Rwanda**

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**Research Report Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University
of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Award of the Degree of Master of Arts in
English Language Education**

Supervisor:

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Johannesburg, February 2007

DECLARATION

I, Ritha NYIRATUNGA, declare that this research report is my own original work. It has never been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university. I am submitting it for the degree of Master of Arts in English Language Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Signed

February 12th, 2007

DEDICATION

To the Almighty God my Creator,

To my son Benny Bryan,

For what we went through together

To my late parents,

for the trust they always had in me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not have reached this stage without the help of many people to whom I would like to extend my profound gratitude. May they find in whatever success is granted to this research the reward for their contributions of different kinds.

First and foremost, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to **Mrs. Yvonne Reed**, my supervisor, who, in addition to her multiple commitments, kindly accepted to supervise this work. I wholeheartedly thank her for her invaluable support and help from Honours to Master level. Her encouragement and her understanding of the difficult moments I went through while working on this project helped me to keep going. May she find here my deepest thanks.

I am greatly indebted to all the lecturers in the AELS department at the University of the Witwatersrand for having enlightened my intellectual journey. I hereby acknowledge the contribution of Professor Hilary Janks, Dr Carolyn McKenney, and Mrs. Laura Dison for their advice. I also wish to express my thanks to Mrs. Mary McKenney and Samantha Naidoo for their moral support.

My deep thanks go to all the lecturers and students at the University of the Witwatersrand and the National University of Rwanda, who participated in this research, and whose names cannot be mentioned here for ethical reasons. With them I hope that this research report will contribute to improve assessment practices.

Special thanks are conveyed to my family for accepting my absence from home as a necessary step forward in our lives. Without their unconditional love and moral support, I could not have taken this step. I wish to convey my special thanks to my sister Lea, for always being there for me. Last but not least, I wish to thank all my friends in South Africa, Appolinaire, Manda, Alex, Barbara, Benithe, Donald, and Pandelis for supporting me all the way long.

ABSTRACT

Scholars in the field of assessment recognize its key role in teaching and learning (Knight 1998, Brown and Knight 1996, Gipps 1994, Glaser 1990, Van Rooyen and Prinsloo 2003). According to Knight, assessment is 'the most significant prompt for learning' (1998:37). This study aimed to understand the role and the nature of assessment in academic literacy modules offered in two very different teaching and learning contexts. The focus of the research is 'Foundation in English Language' at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and 'Writing English I' at the National University of Rwanda (NUR).

To conduct the investigation, three lecturers teaching on the Foundation module at Wits and, two lecturers teaching Writing English I at the NUR were interviewed individually and six students from each lecturer's group participated in a focus group interview. In addition to the interviews, all the assignment and examination tasks, as well as students' marked assignments and examination scripts were analysed.

Although the study reveals many differences in both attitudes and practices in the two institutions, it also shows some similarities, especially in relation to students' negative response to participation in one on one consultation with a lecturer.

The most important difference noticed is in the role of assessment in the two modules. It was found that in the Writing English I module at NUR, assessment is considered separate from the teaching and learning process, whereas at Wits it is an integral part of the process. This difference in orientation to assessment influenced much of the planning and assessment of the two modules. In the Foundation module at Wits, assessment was planned into the course. Consequently, assignments were carefully scaffolded to promote students' learning in regard to academic writing, with feedback given on essay drafts. At NUR where assessment was not planned into the course there was no clear focus on some important aspects of academic writing such as referencing and writing from sources without plagiarizing and there was no scaffolding of the assignments or feedback on drafts.

The study concludes with some recommendations to lecturers and students and also to the leadership of the institutions, given that some of the recommendations have resource implications.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AEELS :	Applied English Language Studies
EFL :	English as a Foreign Language
ESL :	English as a Second Language
NUR :	National University of Rwanda
USA :	United States of America
Wits :	University of the Witwatersrand

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CHAPTER ONE.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a general introduction to the study. It starts with a brief description of the context in which the study was conducted. It also explains why the study was conducted and what it aimed to achieve. The last section is a brief outline of all the chapters in the study.

1.1 Research context

This research has been conducted in two quite different academic environments. These are the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), in South Africa, and the National University of Rwanda (NUR), in Rwanda. It focuses on assessment practices in academic writing modules at both universities, specifically in Foundation in English Language module 1, offered by the Department of Applied English Language Studies (AELS 123/124) at Wits, and in Writing English I offered by the Department of English at the National University of Rwanda. This description of the research context focuses on the students, with emphasis on their linguistic backgrounds, and on the university policy in regard to admitting students to the modules. It also takes into account the political and socio-economic contexts in which the two institutions operate.

1.1.1 Foundation modules at the University of the Witwatersrand

The module 'Foundation in English Language' offered by lecturers in Applied English Language Studies (AELS) is one of several foundation courses offered at the University of the Witwatersrand. According to Granville and Dison 'foundation courses in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand were established in the mid 1990s to provide redress for students who, under apartheid, were denied access to adequate standards of education at primary and secondary schools' (2005:101). These courses were introduced as an attempt to integrate language and learning skills into the content areas (Granville

and Dison, 2005:101).

Granville and Dison explain that the module is taken mainly by students who do not meet the normal entry requirements of the university. Such students write a special selection test, which evaluates both their ability to succeed academically and their motivation. If they are selected, they are placed in one of the five foundation courses, which are designed to help them master conventional 'Western' academic discourses and write their assignments in fluent English (Granville and Dison 2005).

Most students who take the foundation modules have primary languages that range across all eleven South African official languages and most have a command of two or more of South Africa's indigenous languages (Granville and Dison, 2005:102). English is currently the only language of instruction and with the exception of a very small number of students for whom it is a foreign language; all the students on the foundation programmes speak English as an additional language. Most of the students, as Granville and Dison (2005:102) argue, are fluent in spoken English but may not have the kind of English language competence needed for developing conceptual understanding at the university level.

1.1.2 Academic writing modules at the National University of Rwanda

Rwanda inherited from the colonizer (Belgium) a language that is still used today (after more than thirty years of independence), as an official language, and that is French. The political changes that occurred after the 1990-1994 war and genocide, together with the changes in the linguistic contexts of the population, revealed a need to move from a bilingual (Kinyarwanda-French) language-in-education policy to a trilingual one (Kinyarwanda-French-English).

All the students who enter higher education institutions in Rwanda today have

English as an additional language. Some of them are comparatively proficient in English as they were born and grew up in neighbouring countries where English is an official language such as Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya. However, both those who were exposed to English outside the classroom and those who were not, do not have from their secondary schools backgrounds the academic writing skills needed to cope with tertiary studies. As a result they need assistance in developing the writing skills that can help them integrate effectively into the new academic environment of the university.

Two modules, which focus on the development of writing skills, are offered in first year at the National University of Rwanda. These are '*Writing English I*' and '*Oral and Written Expressions in English*'. Writing I is offered to all first year students in the English department and Oral and Written Expressions in English is offered to all other first year students in other departments. This module is offered to students for whom French has been the language of teaching and learning. Those who had English as the language of teaching and learning have a French version of the module (Techniques d' Expression Orale et Ecrite en Francais), where they are introduced to academic writing in French.

These modules were introduced to meet the university's bilingual language-in-education policy introduced after 1994. By introducing that policy, one of the things the university intended to do was to reduce the cost of the teaching as it was assumed that after taking these modules, both students who were educated in French in secondary school and those who were educated in English would be able to follow the teaching in both languages, and therefore be taught by the same lecturers, either French speakers or English speakers.

The module that is the focus of the research at the NUR, '*Writing English I*', is an embedded academic writing module, offered only to students entering the English Department. By contrast, the AELS module offered at Wits is a generic

academic literacy course offered to students from various disciplines within the Faculties of Humanities and Law.

Although the module Oral and Written Expression in English seems to be more directly comparable to the Wits module as they are both offered to students across disciplines, I preferred to consider the module Writing English I because students who take that module in the English department are 'more fluent' in English compared to those in other departments who take the module Oral and Written Expression in English. They are the ones who could help in the focus group interviews. Another reason for that choice is that, only part of the time is allocated to the teaching of writing in the Oral and Written Expression in English module while for Writing English I, the focus is put only on academic writing. As my main objective was to investigate the assessment practices in academic writing modules, Writing English I was the best module to consider at the NUR.

1.1.3 Political and socio-economic context

The two universities are situated in two different political and socio-economic environments. The NUR is in a developing country, which is trying to recover from the political and socio-economic devastation of a four-year war (1990-1994). The educational system was deeply affected by that war because, apart from losing many educators, educational infrastructures, among them libraries, were destroyed and books were burned or stolen by individuals. This destruction of teaching and learning resources has long-term consequences because although education is a priority for development, the government rebuilding policy needs also to give priority to other sectors like health and community development in general. This makes the context of teaching and learning at the NUR quite different from that at Wits University.

While South Africa is also a developing country in which the post-apartheid government struggles to allocate sufficient resources to address the needs of the

whole population, the historically advantaged university has good quality resources. As Granville and Dison 2005 argue, South African Universities were race-based institutions and Wits University's student population was largely white and English speaking which made of Wits an advantaged university under the apartheid regime. In fact, whereas students and lecturers at the NUR have access to only one main library with few and fairly dated books, students and lecturers at Wits have a range of libraries with recent books in various domains available to them.

With reference to resources, in the twenty first century, one cannot ignore access to computers. Students at both universities have access to computers through computer labs. In addition to having access to computers, all first year students in all Faculties at the NUR are offered a module on computer literacy. As far as human resources are concerned, the lecturer-learner ratio is quite different at the two universities for the two modules considered in the study. Whereas the average number of students per lecturer for the Foundation module is thirty (information supplied by module co-ordinator), a lecturer at NUR might have in one class from sixty to a hundred students (from NUR statistics).

1.2 Aims

The research aims to investigate assessment practices in regard to writing in two first year English language modules, one at the University of the Witwatersrand and another at the National University of Rwanda. It aims to understand how assessment of writing is planned and implemented in two departments in the two institutions, and what effects these assessment practices have on students' development of academic writing.

It is anticipated that there will be both similarities and differences in the practices of lecturers in the two institutions as they attempt to support the academic literacy development of students who speak English as an additional language. It

is possible that findings about practices in each institution will be of interest to the other, as well as to other tertiary institutions situated in contexts that may be similar to one or the other of these two universities.

1.3 Rationale

Lubisi argues that '[I]f we wish to discover the truth about an educational system, we must look into its assessment procedures' (1999:73). The importance of assessment for teaching and learning is also emphasized by Brown and Knight (1994:12) in their claim that it 'provides information for better learning and teaching'. I hope that understanding assessment practices at the NUR where I am a lecturer will provide my colleagues and myself with information that will assist us to improve our teaching. Also, understanding the practices at Wits, will give us an idea of what is done in an academic context different from ours, and we could learn from the differences, and try out some good practices that could be applied at NUR to improve the teaching and learning of academic writing.

Also, in case, for instance, in the future the resources either material or human might not remain at their current level, lecturers and students at Wits or elsewhere might learn from those at NUR how to work with limited resources. They might also learn from the NUR experience, how to teach English to students for whom English is a foreign language, as their needs might differ from those for whom it is an additional language. The research report could also inform any other practitioners in tertiary institutions in contexts either similar to Wits or NUR or other different contexts about what could be the assessment practices in different contexts.

In educational discourses, assessment is also constituted as 'the most significant prompt for learning' (Boud, in Knight, 1998:37). Thus, if a teacher aims to provide high quality learning opportunities, assessment procedures need to be carefully considered and need to be integrated into the curriculum. This is what

Gipps (1994:10) emphasizes when quoting the point made by Glaser (1990) that 'assessment must be used in support of learning rather than just to indicate current or past achievement'. This conceptualisation of assessment motivated this study because I believe that when assessment is used to support learning, it considers what we as educators can give to our learners/students in order to improve their learning. It also informs us on how and when we can give our students what they need from us, rather than checking what they have gained from our teaching at a point in time. This point refers to the importance of formative assessment, which according to Sadler (1989) quoted in Gipps (1994:124) is 'concerned with how judgements about the quality of students' responses can be used to shape and improve their competence by short-circuiting the randomness and inefficiency of trial-and-error learning'. Formative assessment therefore helps teachers plan and implement quality teaching, knowing their students' needs.

The decision to direct my investigation into the specific area of assessment of written assignments and examinations was influenced by the central place of writing in tertiary education (Lillis, 1997:183). In fact, as a student at Wits and a lecturer at NUR, I have become aware of the importance of being able to write in accordance with particular academic conventions. My own experience as both a student and a teacher aroused my interest in the possible role played by assessment in the development of a student's academic writing. The choice to investigate the assessment of writing was also motivated by the fact that it was the most accessible considering its structure (assessment of reading, listening... would have been difficult to investigate). As Bray (1999) argues, the assessment of writing is more highly structured than any other forms of assessment. Showing the importance of assessment, Bray (1999:80) asserts that '[w]ithout assessment you and your pupils will never know how far you-and they- have achieved the course objectives' For these reasons, I intended to investigate assessment practices at the two universities in regard to how written assignments and

examination papers are constructed, presented to students, and assessed.

The choice to consider the module 'Foundation in English Language' at the University of the Witwatersrand was made because it focuses on writing development. As Leibowitz puts it '[w]riting is often developed in *writing intensive* courses such as *foundation courses*' (2000:27). Also, the module is quite similar in what it aims to achieve to the module 'Writing English I' offered to first year students at the NUR by the English department (Faculty of Arts). Therefore the investigation will be based in two modules with more or less similar purposes as far as their focus on academic writing in university first years programmes is concerned.

It is also for practical reasons that the research is based in these two modules offered at two different universities. As a student at the University of the Witwatersrand, I have been able to access data from the 'Foundation in English language' module 1 (from both lecturers and students). Being a staff member of the National University of Rwanda, it has been possible for me to access data from the 'Writing English I' module through colleagues and through a data-gathering visit to the university.

1.3.1 Research question(s)

This research focuses on one main question:

What are the assessment practices in the two first year academic writing modules at the University of the Witwatersrand and the National University of Rwanda?

There are also several sub questions addressed in order to deal with the main question, and some of them are:

- 1. Are the assignment tasks scaffolded? If so, how is the scaffolding done?*
- 2. Are the assessment criteria specified? If so, what is foregrounded /backgrounded in these criteria?*
- 3. With reference to mark allocation, what is emphasized in the allocation and weighting of marks?*
- 4. What kind of feedback on their assignments do students receive and how is this conveyed to them?*
- 5. How do students respond to this feedback?*
- 6. What kind of feedback do the students prefer and why?*

1.4 Chapter outline

This research report is organized into five chapters outlined as follows:

The first chapter is a general introduction and aims to help the reader get an overview of what I wanted to do, why, and where it was done. It therefore gives the context of the study, the aims and rationale.

The second chapter is a literature review of some theories and research studies that informed this study. This literature is used to analyse the data gathered for this case study.

The third chapter presents the methodology used in the study. It describes the data collection and data analysis methods and explains why some methods were chosen rather than others. It gives details about the research sites and research subjects.

The fourth chapter presents the different kinds of data and shows the different themes and sub themes that emerged from the raw data. It is also concerned with the analysis and discussion of the data.

The fifth chapter sums up the findings of the study, and gives recommendations for sound assessment of academic writing in which assessment is used in support of learning.

CHAPTER TWO.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews literature on the teaching and assessment of academic writing. It explores ideas of different scholars and establishes a framework for analysis of the data gathered in this case study.

The role of assessment in teaching is becoming more and more recognized, and various scholars have conducted research that has helped to draw practitioners' attention to the role assessment plays in teaching and learning. Brown and Knight (1994:33-35) argue that assessment is done because:

- Students expect it
- Students are motivated by assessment
- It can provide feedback
- It can help students remedy mistakes
- It indicates readiness for progression
- It can help diagnose faults
- It provides performance indicator for students
- It enables grading and final degree classification.

However, there are concerns that many school and university teachers do not give assessment the central role in learning that it deserves. The reasons for this might vary from lack of means or enough information to lack of interest and unwillingness to change current practices. It is with a belief that most lecturers are interested in high quality outcomes from their teaching that the research attempts an investigation of assessment practices in two first year academic writing modules at the University of the Witwatersrand and the National University of Rwanda.

Due to the relationship between the teaching of writing and its assessment, the first part of this literature review focuses on the teaching of writing and its

assessment, and draws particularly on the literature on academic literacy. The second part reviews the literature related to assessment as an important practice embedded in the process of teaching, with an emphasis on the assessment of writing. As assessment is central to this research, some key definitions from the literature are included in part two.

2.1 Writing at University

This section of the literature review is oriented to academic literacy. It consists of two sections (i) the teaching and learning of writing in the university, and (ii) the assessment practices associated with this teaching and learning.

Learning in higher education involves adapting to new ways of knowing: new ways of understanding, interpreting and organising knowledge (Lea and Street, 1998:158). To be successful, this adaptation to new ways requires combined efforts from both lecturers and students, and when necessary a contribution from the institution. As Kroll (1990:140) argues, '[W]riting is frequently a difficult skill for any user, which is to say that writing presents a fairly challenging task for both native and non-native speakers'. In many tertiary institutions, specific English language courses are designed to help first year students adapt to the new academic environment with its requirements, one of the most important of which is 'writing in an acceptable academic style'. The writing that students are taught may be quite different from what they have been taught in secondary schools. As Grabe and Kaplan argue,

...in post- secondary institutions, and in post-graduate programmes, the uses of writing evolve to take on new dimensions. Writing is no longer seen as primarily for personal expression or presenting school-based information, though they remain important issues. (1996:341)

This point is also emphasized by Moore, who argues that,

The school system (in all but the most elite settings) cannot adequately prepare students for the demands of academic writing at university. The intellectual demands of the two sites (school and tertiary institutions) usually differ, as do the discursive requirements of various disciplines. (1998:86)

Referring to tertiary-level undergraduate students as advanced writers, Grabe and Kaplan (1996) discuss what is expected from the writing of these students. They argue that apart from writing for personal expression, the advanced writer is also expected to analyse and interpret information critically, synthesize disparate sets of information, create information, argue alternative perspectives, and present and promote research. Therefore, there is a clear need for more specialized academic skills for these 'advanced' writers.

Writing (at university) is placed by some scholars at the centre of learning as it is not only a requirement in the English language courses where it is the focus, but is also an important contributor to success in most other courses. This has implications for the teaching and learning of writing. Students, on the one hand, are faced with the challenge of communicating their learning/knowledge in an academically acceptable writing style and lecturers, on the other, try to combine the assessment of students' writing skills with assessment of the academic content that they are studying. This, therefore, makes the assessment of writing a complex but important task for lecturers at university, especially in first year. In fact, lecturers need to define carefully what they are teaching writing for, in order to be able to offer a valid and fair assessment of students' writing.

2.1.1 Teaching and Learning Writing

In deciding what to teach students about writing, the first thing to consider should be 'why they are being taught writing'; in other words, 'what they are taught writing for'. This implies that the English language lecturer will need to

understand the needs of the learners. The context of learning will play an important role as, for instance, additional language learners of English in an 'English-rich' environment might not have the same needs as foreign language learners. Kroll (1990:140) argues that '[F]or English as a second language (ESL) students, it seems fair to say that writing academic papers is particularly difficult'. If compared to native speakers, many ESL and EFL speakers are likely to struggle to write in an acceptable academic style. Therefore, knowing where the students come from (in relation to language background) is important in the planning and teaching of writing. It is believed that many first year students at university, including some who use English as their home language, will have specific needs in relation to academic writing that will need to be addressed in order for them to be successful in the academic context of the tertiary institution.

Many scholars have discussed the importance of writing and teaching writing in the academy. As Archer argues, '[W]riting is not simply a functional activity. Rather, writing is a mode of learning integral to student development' (2000:135). The importance of writing in the academy is also pointed out by Leibowitz who states that 'writing is an important aspect of one's development as a student, teacher, or teacher of writing in the academy' (2000:15). She also argues that 'successful writing is vital to success in any of these roles, and lack of success with writing operates as a significant barrier to success'. Here, she demonstrates the role of writing as both a gate opener (if successful) and a gate closer (if not successful).

Writing deserves particular attention in the academy and scholars have worked to develop methods of teaching it. The importance of writing is pointed out by Leibowitz, who argues that 'it is the medium in which writers are required to display their knowledge' (2000:21). Even if one has deep knowledge of what s/he needs to express, failure to express it correctly (by writing or speaking) can lead to failure.

The more important writing is seen to be in tertiary institutions, the more complex is the role of writing teachers. Kroll (1990:59) argues that '[T]he role of the writing teacher is schizophrenic, split into three incompatible personas: teacher as real reader (i.e., audience), teacher as coach, and teacher as evaluator'. There has been some critical comment on these roles of the writing teacher. Considering the teacher-student power relationship, it is indeed difficult to believe that, the teacher/lecturer will read his/her students' writing as just a genuine reader, that is, the way we read published books of our choices. The role of the teacher as a coach has to be handled carefully because, as Kroll (1990:60) argues, 'if after coaching the students, the work is judged insufficient according to the standards of that educational setting, the teacher has in a sense, betrayed the students by not intervening heavily'. Teachers of writing have to devise ways of teaching that suit their objectives, resources, and contexts of teaching.

Lea and Street note that 'educational research into student writing in higher education has fallen into three main perspectives or models: study skills; academic socialisation; and academic literacies' (1998:158). The same models are described by Jones, Turner, and Street (1999:xx). It is important to mention here that the three models are not presented as mutually exclusive. Each is briefly described in the next three sub-sections.

2.1.1.1 Study Skills Model

The study skills approach, as Jones *et.al.* argue, 'had assumed that literacy is a set of atomised skills (surface language, grammar, spelling), which students have to learn and which are then transferable to other contexts' (1999:xxi). While students do need knowledge of grammar and spelling, research into writing indicates that it is more important for writing teachers to focus first on content and its selection and organization (Gipps, 1994; Grabe and Kaplan, 1996).

Investigating what constitutes improvement in teaching writing, Leki (1990) raises

the issue of whether L2 writing needs to be error free or merely free of global errors that impede understanding. This constitutes a challenge to teachers working with additional or foreign language speakers because they need to decide on their priority: teaching writing for surface language, grammar and spelling or teaching language for academic development, where the content and presentation are given priority.

2.1.1.2 Academic Socialization Model

The 'academic socialization' model, as described by Lea and Street (1998), defines a specific task for tutors. They argue that 'the task of tutor/advisor is to induct students into a new 'culture', that of the academy'(1998:159). This is a crucial point in teaching writing to students in the first years of university study because, as mentioned earlier, they are confronted with new writing expectations, many of which are quite different from what they were used to in secondary schools. The academic socialization then focuses on student orientation to learning and interpretation of learning tasks, through conceptualisation of a distinction between 'deep', 'surface', and 'strategic' approaches to learning (Lea and Street, 1998:159). This approach, although giving importance to contextual factors in students' writing is criticized by Jones *et.al.* (1999) for treating writing as a transparent medium of representation and therefore failing to address the deep language, literacy and discourse issues involved in the institutional production and representation of meaning.

2.1.1.3 Academic Literacies Model

This approach sees literacies as social practices. Lea and Street argue that, 'it views student writing and learning as issues at the level of epistemology and identities rather than skill or socialisation' (1998:159). They note that 'an academic literacies approach views the institutions in which academic practices take place as constituted in, and as sites of, discourse and power'. In higher

education, the university is the institution of power as it determines the acceptable discourses of writing that students are required to use. Lea and Street argue also that 'the academic literacies model sees the literacy demands of the curriculum as involving a variety of communicative practices, including genres, fields and disciplines' (1998:159).

Moore (1998:86) supports the 'academic literacy' approach to writing. He argues that this approach 'gives greater prominence to the role of writing in reflecting and advancing the conceptual goals of a discipline' (1998:86). He also states that 'the academic literacy approach to writing is a realization that the curriculum needs to pay greater attention to the opportunities it provides for students to explicitly grapple with the language of the discipline' (1998:86). For instance, an essay written in the Department of Physics might have different features from one written in the Departments of Literature or Psychology. To extend his point, Moore (1994), quoted in Angélil-Carter (1998:86), goes on to argue that 'The various forms of writing (or genres) common to a discipline need to be modelled and understood for how they convey meaning to different audiences for different purposes'. These varied practices make the task of tutors of first year writing more complex. In fact, tutors/lecturers are expected to equip these new students with the ability to cope with the specific demands of different fields and disciplines in the new academic environment.

With reference to the academic literacies model, students also face some demands. As Lea and Street (1998:159) point out, 'a dominant feature of academic literacy practices, from the student's point of view is the requirement to switch practices between one setting and another, to deploy a repertoire of linguistic practices appropriate to each setting, and to handle the social meanings and identities that each evokes'. Research has indicated that various students struggle to switch from the school setting into the university one. In fact, 'studies into academic learning have shown that there appears to be a gap between

students' expectations and the expectations of educational institutions' (Jones *et.al.* 1999: 6). These students therefore need extra help to effectively adapt to the new academic environment; and helping them in their writing is one of the priorities, due to the place writing has in academic literacies. It should be noted that some writers on academic literacy are raising questions about the possible negative effects on students' voices of 'assimilationist' academic literacy practices (e.g. Lillis 1997; Ivanic 1998).

Various methods have been developed to teach writing. Leibowitz discusses the contribution of educationists and notes that '[E]ducationists seeking to use writing as a gate-opener rather than closer, have adopted a variety of approaches, from one extreme of focusing on the product to the other, of focusing entirely on the process' (2000:24). She also outlines the position of the genre theorists who argue that students need to develop an understanding of the written conventions associated with a range of genres for the purpose of use and/or ideological critique. Although these two approaches (teaching writing-as-a-process, and the genre approach to teaching writing) might seem to be in conflict, various researchers argue for a synthesis of aspects of these approaches. For example Elbow (1994), quoted in Leibowitz and Mohamed (2000:24) argues that one should sensibly adopt a mix of the approaches. The following section outlines some of the literature on both the process approach and the genre approach to teaching writing.

2.1.2 The 'writing as-a-process' approach

In many countries, the writing-as-a-process approach was introduced only in the 1980's (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996). In the USA, Grabe and Kaplan, referring to Applebee (1981), argue that prior to the 1980s students were only taught to outline and write 'themes' based on four major 'rhetorical' distinctions - description, narration, exposition, and argumentation -and often framed in a three-or-five-paragraph format (1996:84). This, in fact was the practice in most

countries, and whether there is a noticeable shift to a more 'writing-as-a-process' approach in all teaching contexts remains open to question.

The process approach to writing as Grabe and Kaplan (1996) present it, is more and more discussed as a wholly positive innovation allowing teachers and students more meaningful interaction and more purposeful writing. The following table adapted from Grabe and Kaplan (1996:86-87), which summarizes characteristics of both approaches, shows what innovation the process approach brought to the teaching of writing.

Instructional writing (earlier)

- Three-or-five-paragraphs model
- Simplistic assumptions about the organization and ordering of information
- The typical one-draft writing assignment
- The assumption that each student should be working alone, or only with the instructor on summative feedback
- Reliance on grammar/usage handbooks and lectures
- The linear composing model based on outlining, writing, and editing

Process approach to writing

- Self-discovery and authorial 'voice'
- Meaningful writing on topics of importance (or at least of interest) to the writer.
- The need to plan out writing as a goal oriented, conceptualised activity
- Invention and pre-writing tasks, and multiple drafting with feedback between drafts.
- A variety of feedback option from real audiences, whether from peers, small groups, and/or the teacher, through conferencing or through other formative evaluation
- Free writing and journal writing as alternative means of generating writing and developing written expression, overcoming writer's block
- Content information and personal expression as more important than final product grammar and usage

-The idea that writing is multiply recursive rather than linear as process-tasks are repeated alternatively as often as necessary

-Students' awareness of the writing process and of notions such as audience, voice, plans, etc.

2.1.3 The genre approach to writing

Nightingale, whose ideas have been adapted by Archer (2000), sees writing as a social practice. This implies that 'writing and writer are implicated in discourses, ideologies and institutional practices' (Archer, 2000:131). The genre approach to writing is therefore important in the academy especially in its role of helping students shift from a school context into a university context. In most universities, it is the task of tutors of writing in first year to introduce students to different genres within academic writing, as many of them have not had the opportunity of being introduced to these genres at school.

Angélil-Carter, quoting Kress, (1985) defines 'genres' as 'conventionalised forms of texts' which 'derive from and encode the functions, purposes and meaning of social occasions' (2000:157). Also, 'genres', as defined by Archer, (2000:133) are 'abstract, socially legitimated ways of using language'. She goes on to explain that genres consist of norms and conventions for organizing and presenting messages for particular social purposes.

Another point made by Archer is that by writing in different disciplines, students will be able to work through the content, as well as the concepts of the subject. This implies that writing is not a set of skills that should be taught and learnt in a decontextualised way. Genre is therefore an important aspect to consider when teaching writing to first year students, who enter different fields and disciplines, and therefore face different expectations of their writing. What remains in

question however, is how tutors of writing in first year courses (e.g. Foundation in English language at Wits / Writing English I at NUR) can manage to equip various students with knowledge and skills in different writing genres as required by different fields and disciplines. Although it might seem difficult for tutors to address the writing requirements of different disciplines, there are some fundamental features of all academic writing that tutors might be able to address with students, regardless of their future fields of study. One of them that can be found across genres is avoidance of 'plagiarism' which, as Angélil-Carter, (2000:154) argues, 'seems to be a pervasive problem in all tertiary institutions, and one which often frustrates even the most concerned and supportive lecturers'.

2.1.4 Plagiarism in higher education

There are various but closely related definitions of plagiarism. Angélil-Carter (2000) includes a number of definitions from different dictionaries. One of them, from the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* states that to 'plagiarise is to 'take and use somebody else's ideas, words, etc. as if they were one's own' (2000:155-6).

Plagiarism is indeed one of the major problems students encounter when writing in institutions of higher education. The most usual way to counteract plagiarism is to teach students referencing skills. Again, this has to be done in context as plagiarism might be seen differently depending on the writing genre/context. This is the point Jameson (1993), quoted by Angélil-Carter (2000) makes, arguing that

What would constitute culpable plagiarism in one context might constitute proper use of sources in another context depending on the group whose expectations defined 'misappropriation'. (2000:158)

She illustrates her point by showing how plagiarism is conceived differently in

different genres such as the novel, the news article, the speech, and the business report. The genre of the newspaper article for instance 'does not require citations, endnotes, bibliographies, or other textual indicators' (Jameson 1993) in Angélil-Carter (2000:158). The novel genre has its own way of seeing plagiarism. As Jameson, quoted by Angélil-Carter puts it, 'there is no way of crediting a source within a novel, other than a dedication or a footnote. The genre does not permit it'(2000:158). This again shows how the genre approach is highly contextual.

One reason for plagiarism, especially in first year students' writing, is lack of confidence in what they are writing. As Archer argues, '[M]any Southern African students approach academic writing without a sense that they have anything worth saying, because they think that the teacher knows all' (2000:149). This is also the case for Rwandan students who learn English as a foreign language and who think that they must use the words of experts rather than their own. They rely too much on what was written before, and underestimate the importance of originality in writing.

Most students, being unable to explain their thinking, as they have not mastered completely the material, find protection in using some other people's words. This is increased in most cases by weakness in the language being used as the medium of expression. This is what Starfield (1999: 96), using Pennycook's research (1996), explains about plagiarism among students for whom English is an additional language. In fact, she found that students who do not speak English as their first language 'interpret what their teachers viewed as plagiarism as part of a complex process of learning to write according to unfamiliar norms and conventions in a language that was not their primary language'. Students in the study Lea and Street (1998) conducted in a British university also considered plagiarism as 'linked to their developing identities as writers and their relative lack of authority vis-à-vis the authority of academic texts' (quoted in Starfield

1999:97). Lecturers however, in the same study, viewed the issue of plagiarism as 'being about the correct referencing of sources, rather than being about the intertextual constitution of knowledge and the relative powerlessness of students' (Starfield 1999:98). This mismatch in the way students and lecturers interpret plagiarism can have an influence on the approach(es) to use to counteract it (plagiarism).

Since the role of writing teachers is to help students develop their abilities as writers, they make use of various methods and techniques, one of which is 'scaffolding'.

2.1.5 Scaffolding

In real life, scaffolding describes what is placed around the outside of new buildings to allow builders access to the emerging structure as it rises from the ground (Hammond and Gibbons 2001:1). It is from this image that 'the metaphor 'scaffolding ' was first used by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976), to capture the nature of support and guidance for learning' (Hammond and Gibbons 2001:1). All the definitions of scaffolding focus on the notion of the support it provides.

Hammond and Gibbons define scaffolding as the 'support that is designed to provide assistance necessary to enable learners to accomplish tasks and develop understandings that they would not quite be able to manage on their own' (2001:3). This implies that teachers, through their organization of teaching activities, and through the nature of their support and guidance, are able to extend what their students are capable of doing. It is by participating in the activities set by the teacher that students are pushed beyond their current abilities and levels of understanding, and it is then that learning occurs and students are able to 'internalise' new understanding (Hammond and Gibbons, 2001:3). Here the teacher plays the role of a coach, as described earlier by Kroll (1990).

Given that scaffolding is seen as support a teacher gives to guide learners, research has explored the classroom consequences of various combinations of high and low teacher support and challenge (Mariani, 1997 in Hammond and Gibbons, 2001). Findings have revealed that students who experienced learning contexts where there was high challenge but inadequate or low support were frustrated, insecure and anxious. These contexts were found to be too demanding and therefore leading students to failure. In contexts where there was little challenge and little support, students were found to be not motivated and therefore little learning occurred. With low challenge and high support, students were more than comfortable, enjoyed their classroom experiences, but did not learn a great deal. It was deduced that 'it is when the learning context provides both high challenge and high support that most learning takes place' (Hammond and Gibbons, 2001:4).

In the classroom, scaffolding describes the 'temporary, but essential nature of the mentor's assistance' in supporting learners to carry out tasks successfully (Maybin, Mercer & Stierer, 1992:186). It is important to be aware of the temporary nature of scaffolding, as, like the scaffolding used in building, it must be removed once the learner has internalised the guidance. Hammond and Gibbons state that '[B]ecause it is aimed at enabling students to learn independently, teacher support is gradually withdrawn as the learners become increasingly able to complete a task alone' (2001:5).

Scaffolding in the teaching of academic writing serves to help learners develop their ability to write in accordance with academic literacy requirements. The challenge however, is for teachers to be able to help individual learners to reach that required ability, as the needs of learners in the same class might not be the same. To be effective, good scaffolding should be progressively adjusted to address the needs of different students in the same classroom.

Taking the point made by Maybin, Mercer and Steirer (1992), Hammond and Gibbons (2001:7) extend their definition of scaffolding to state that

[S]caffolding is not just any assistance which helps the learner accomplish a task. It is help which will enable a learner to accomplish a task which they would not have been able to manage on their own, and it is help which is intended to bring the learner closer to competence which will enable them eventually to complete such a task on their own.

Gibbons (2002:10) also clarifies the 'helping nature' of scaffolding:

[S]caffolding, however, is not simply another word for *help*. It is a special kind of help that assists learners to move towards new skills, concepts or levels of understanding. Scaffolding is thus the temporary assistance by which a teacher helps a learners know how to do something, so that the learner will later be able to complete a similar task alone. It is future oriented.

Sharpe (2001:32) outlines two distinct opportunities for scaffolding that she suggests would help students to develop deep knowledge and these are 'designed-in' scaffolding, and 'point-of-need' scaffolding. For the 'designed-in' scaffolding, 'the teacher uses the unit-planning stage to consider both the outcomes to be assessed (knowledge, skills and understandings) and the students' previous experiences, in order to plan explicit scaffolding strategies that can be used in the classroom. The 'point-of-need' scaffolding occurs in the immediate context and relies on the teacher being able to identify a 'teachable moment' and maximize the learning potential of that moment (Sharpe 2001:33). In the second part of this literature review the focus is on assessment.

2.2 Definitions of assessment and related terms

The importance of assessment in education has been discussed by various scholars. Different views in relation to what it is, who does it and how it is done

have been the subject of debate. Day and Hounsell (1995:126) emphasise the importance of assessment arguing that:

Assessment is a critical focus of attention in any programme for university teachers, not simply because of the considerable time and effort it demands, but also because of the dilemmas it poses in trying to reconcile the tensions between the summative purpose of assessment-for-grading and the formative purpose of assessment for learning.

Assessment in its various forms is differently defined by various writers as shown in the following sections.

2.2.1 Definitions of Assessment

As Brown and Knight (1994:30) argue, assessment is a 'complex business'. The more complex assessment is understood as being, the more complex are the definitions being constructed. With reference to assessment paradigms, as far back as 1994, Gipps asserted that 'assessment is undergoing a paradigm shift, from psychometrics to a broader model of educational assessment, from a testing and examination culture to an assessment culture' (1994:1). If one thinks of the assessment culture described by Gipps as distinct from a testing and examination culture, one will more likely think of assessment as part of the teaching and learning process.

In discussing the nature of assessment, Rowntree (1999:75) argues that 'assessment in education is thought of as occurring whenever one person, in some kind of interaction, direct or indirect, with another, is conscious of obtaining and interpreting attitudes of that other person'. Different authors offer various definitions of assessment and its related terms.

As defined by Gipps (1994: vii), assessment is a term for a wide range of

methods for evaluating learner performance and attainment including formal testing and examinations, practical and oral assessment, classroom based assessment carried out by teachers, and portfolios. Brown and Knight, with reference to Erwin (1991), argue that assessment refers to a 'systematic basis for making inferences about the learning and development of students...the process of defining, selecting, designing, collecting, analysing, interpreting and using information to increase students' learning and development' (1994:12)

Another definition, which emphasises the role of assessment in teaching and learning, is provided by Brown and Knight (1994:12), when they state that 'assessment provides information for better learning and teaching'. Assessment should therefore be seen by practitioners as part of the teaching process. Discussing the assessment of students' writing in higher education, Starfield argues that 'the way in which we assess students can be seen to play a determining role in defining for our students the real university curriculum' (2000:102).

The point made by Hill and Parry (1994:254) that '*how* we go about assessing literacy skills depends crucially on *why* we are doing it' helps one to understand the purposes of the various assessment practices of writing in first year classes. The assumption here is that what is emphasized by different lecturers while assessing their students' writing reflects their purposes of assessment.

2.2.2 Definitions of terms related to assessment

As there are various definitions of assessment, there are also various terms associated with assessment. The definitions provided in this literature review refer mostly to kinds of assessment, and to qualities associated with assessment. Terms like *summative assessment* and *formative assessment* are general terms referring to the two main purposes of assessment. Some other terms like *validity*, *reliability*, *fairness*, *criterion-referenced assessment*, *self-assessment*, *peer*

assessment, etc, refer more to qualities of assessment.

2.2.2.1 Formative assessment

Formative assessment, as defined in the South African *Revised National Curriculum Statement Grade R-9 (schools)*, 'monitors and supports the process of learning and teaching, and is used to inform learners and teachers about learners' progress so as to improve learning. Constructive feedback is given to enable learners to develop' (2002: 126). This point about formative assessment is also made by Gipps when she states that 'formative assessment takes place during the course of teaching and is used essentially to feed back into the teaching/learning process' (1994:vii).

Sutton states that formative assessment 'is part of the upward spiral of teaching and learning' (1991:24). These definitions highlight the importance of assessment and feedback in the teaching /learning process. In discussing the nature and importance of formative assessment in the teaching/learning process, Sutton argues that 'formative assessment is an ongoing process, conducted both formally and informally, by which information and evidence about learning is absorbed and used to plan the next step, or guide through a given task' (1991:3). This point is taken further by Glaser, quoted in Gipps (1994:11), who argues that "assessment must offer 'executable advice' to both students and teachers; knowledge must be assessed in terms of its constructive use for further action'. Formative assessment is primarily seen by various scholars as a key element of the teaching/learning process, and Brown and Knight make this point when they assert that 'formative assessment is a central element of learning, in that the feedback students receive enables them to develop and extend themselves in ways that end-point assessment cannot.'(1994:7)

Formative assessment is also considered by some authors as a step towards summative assessment. This is clearly stated by Van Rooyen and Prinsloo

(2003:38) who argue that 'formative assessment helps to decide on the readiness of learners to do a summative assessment'. They also argue that 'formative assessment is developmental in nature. It does not award credits or certificates', which summative assessment often does.

2.2.2.2 Summative assessment

A summative assessment is an assessment that enables the educator to sum up the extent of the learners' progress at the end of a learning programme or a finite part of the programme (Van Rooyen and Prinsloo, 2003). The end of semester examinations are generally used as summative assessment by most university teachers, and they cover a bigger part of the learning program compared to formative assessment conducted in the course of the programme. As Gipps states, 'summative assessment takes place at the end of a term or a course and is used to provide information about how much students have learned and how well a course has worked' (1994:vii). Summative assessment is also used for curriculum planning, and to help teachers/lecturers evaluate their success in comparison to objectives set at the beginning of the course or the programme. It is therefore more useful for the assessors, and less useful for learners/students as in many instances they do not receive any feedback from it. It is also used sometimes for selection or classification purposes, and in most cases ends up being used as a gatekeeper (when, for instance, students have to obtain a certain mark to be allowed into the next class).

2.2.2.3 Validity

Validity is defined as the extent to which an assessment measures what it purports to measure (Gipps, 1994:vii). An assessment that does not measure what it is designed to, can be misleading by giving results that are not sufficiently valid to take decisions from. Validity is recognized to be an essential criterion for sound assessment. It is hard to imagine the point of making an assessment that

is not valid when one needs to evaluate the teaching or learning process. It is therefore important to bear in mind, when setting assessment tasks that one's assessment has to provide information about what one needs to find out. A task about grammar for instance will not necessarily reveal how coherent or incoherent students are in their writing. Sutton (1991:9-10) gives a good illustration of this point by making the distinction between what she labels the 'WYTIWYG principle, that is, What You Test Is What You Get', and the 'HYTIWYG principle, being How You Test Is What You Get'. This emphasizes the fact that in order to be valid, any assessment task should focus on what the assessor wants to find out. For example, one should not set a task testing coherence when the need is to test or assess language use, grammar or spelling. However, some teachers prefer to test more than one aspect of writing at a time, or find themselves focussing on language mistakes when assessing students' ability to write in a given genre.

2.2.2.4 Reliability

Bachman and Palmer (1996:19) refer to reliability and validity as essential measurement qualities for tests. They define reliability as 'consistency of measurement'. Gipps in a clearer definition, refers to reliability as 'the extent to which an assessment would produce the same, or similar score on two occasions or when given by two assessors' (1994:vii). This is important especially for examinations/high stake examinations, where institutions need to avoid any kind of bias towards or against certain candidates. There are techniques that can be used to promote reliability, and one of them is to set clear assessment criteria. In fact assessment criteria, not only help the assessed to know what is expected from them, but also serve to avoid subjectivity, although one cannot guarantee a total objectivity in assessment of writing (as one may be able to do in mathematics), because the assessor as a reader brings in his/her own judgment to a certain extent. What assessment criteria can help do is to limit subjectivity. As Hyland (2003) argues, 'a writing assessment task is considered

reliable if it measures consistently, both in terms of the same student on different occasions and the same task across different raters’.

2.2.2.5 Fairness

Fairness is an important quality of any assessment. Fairness of an assessment implies that the method of assessment does not present any barriers to achievements that are not related to the evidence (Van Rooyen and Prinsloo, 2003). In other words, an assessment is fair if it does not disadvantage anyone, although I believe that this is a huge challenge for any assessor. I agree with Van Rooyen and Prinsloo (2003), that in some circumstances it might be unfair to compare the work of different learners if there is great variety /difference in their learning styles, home language, values, life experiences, as all those factors influence to a certain extent the learners’ learning and performance. In the case of first year students, their educational background might also influence the way they cope with the new academic requirements and should not be neglected if fairness is to be considered. The context of teaching and learning should be considered by individual lecturers/tutors to avoid giving advantage to some students. If in a class only some students have access to resources (such as a computer or the internet), it would be unfair to require a typed assignment and punish bad or unclear handwriting. Assessment should first and foremost be based on fair criteria.

2.2.2.6 Criterion-referenced assessment

Criterion-referenced assessment is defined by Sutton (1991:5) as measuring the learner’s (student’s) performance against predetermined expectations, which are usually written down and built into the assessment process. This specification of criteria helps students to know in advance what they are expected to know and do. It also promotes fairness when it comes to assessing students’ work. However, it might restrict students’ expression of their knowledge and skills if

opportunities to go beyond the minimum criteria are not encouraged.

2.2.2.7 Ipsative assessment

Ipsative assessment is a form of assessment linked to self-assessment, as it is done by learners/students themselves. Gipps defines it as the assessment in which learners evaluate their current performance against their previous performance (1994:vii). This practice can work well in teaching and learning writing, combined with scaffolded assessment, when learners are progressively prepared for a final task. The feedback they receive from previous drafts can help them improve their work and evaluate their progress in comparison with previous performances. Ipsative assessment may make use of specific criteria.

2.2.3 Assessment and learning to write

There are various reasons why assessment is considered an integral part of academic practice. One of them, 'assessment for learning' is being given more and more importance in contemporary literature.

Brown and Knight (1994:12) state that '[I]t is not curriculum which shapes assessment, but assessment which shapes the curriculum'. In critiquing some lecturers' neglect of assessment's central role in learning, Starfield states that '[A]ssessment should be conceived of as an integral part of course design and development and not *bolted-on* at the end' (2000:103). In fact, formative assessment has an important role to play in students' learning, because a skill or aspect of knowledge highlighted in assessment can assist them to focus attention on learning that particular skill or knowledge (Starfield, 2000: 103). This point is emphasized by Boud (1995:37) who argues that '[E]very act of assessment gives a message to students about what they should be learning and how they should go about it'. Gipps also emphasizes the role of assessment in learning. When quoting Glaser (1990), she argues that 'assessment must be

used in support of learning rather than just to indicate current or past achievement' (1994:10). These scholars' ideas indicate how important it is to plan for assessment as one plans for teaching. It is however, not always the practice of some lecturers to think of assessment as they think of teaching. In some instances, lecturers only give thought to assessment after part of a course has been taught, when 'they can know what to assess students on' (from interview data). This comment implies that some lecturers see assessment as only evaluation or even as useful only for testing purposes.

Assessment as viewed by Starfield (2000:109), should be both formative and summative. It should be used summatively to evaluate students' performance at the end of a course, but should be used formatively as a way of helping students to learn, through diagnosing misunderstanding and reinforcing correct understanding.

2.2.4 Assessment of writing

The importance given to assessment of writing in tertiary education is mostly motivated by the place of academic writing at university. As Paxton (1998:136) states, 'much has been written about academic literacies and the power they have to act as gatekeepers, to maintain the *status quo* at tertiary institutions by allowing in only those who can use the discourse appropriately'. Also, explaining why 'good writing assessment matters' Hamp-Lyons argues that 'access to written language, and to writing in English in particular, remains a 'good' that greatly influences access to many, even, most, other 'goods' in the twenty-first century world (2002:5). The importance of writing assessment is also pointed out by Grabe and Kaplan (1996:377) when they argue that ' [R]esponding to students' writing can greatly influence student attitudes to writing and their motivation for future learning'.

Grabe and Kaplan argue that responses to students' writing can have either

positive or negative effects. If the responses are constructive, 'students are positively motivated to explore many areas of knowledge and personal creativity through supportive and constructive responses to their writing' (1996:377). If the responses are not constructive, 'students are confused by unclear, vague, or ambiguous responses and can therefore be frustrated with their writing process' (1996:377).

There are various ways of assessing students' writing, and it is believed that 'the goals we set for our writing classes go a long way toward determining how we will respond to our students' writing' (Kroll 1990:59). Different teachers might choose to focus on different elements of language while assessing their students' writing, and they also might use various ways of responding. The most popular way of responding to students' writing is through giving feedback, and there are different kinds of feedback: written versus oral, individual versus group feedback, etc. The choice of which kind of feedback is appropriate to a specific task given to specific students in a specific context belongs to the lecturer who is assumed to know both the context of study and the objectives to be attained.

2.2.4.1 Feedback

As Leki (1990:57) argues, 'how best we respond to student writing is part of the broader question of how to create a context in which people learn to write better or more easily'. The point made here shows the influence of teacher responses on students' writing in the learning process. Boud (1995), quoted by Kaunda *et.al.* (1998), argues for the 'complementary nature of assessment and learning'. Feedback-giving constitutes an important part of formative assessment, and therefore contributes to the teaching-learning process. In fact, Kaunda *et.al.* state that ' [F]ormative assessment emphasises the provision of quality feedback which students can use to improve their learning' (1998:181). This attests to the important role of assessment in the learning process.

Before the introduction of the process approach to writing, 'much feedback to students on their writing appeared in the form of a final grade on a paper, often accompanied by much red ink throughout the essay' (Grabe and Kaplan 1999:378). Students were assumed to think about all the mistakes, figure out the reasoning behind the grade, and work to avoid the multiplicity of mistakes in their next writing tasks. Arguing against this practice, Luckett and Sutherland state that tutors should 'provide realistic feedback around issues which the student can grasp and act upon for improvement' (2000:126).

For effective use of feedback, it is important that lecturers and students share the same understanding of the feedback and its purpose as emphasised by Diab (2006:2) who argues that:

...if teachers and students both understand the purpose of certain correction techniques and agree on their use, feedback is more likely to be productive. Conversely, if teachers and students have mutually exclusive ideas regarding correction techniques, the result will most likely be feedback that is ineffective and, in the worst case, discouraging for students who are learning to write in their second language.

Diab clarifies also the role of lecturers in feedback interpretation arguing that, 'teachers should help their students understand how feedback is intended to affect their writing and why it is given the way it is' (2006:6). Lecturers' assistance may be needed to help students understand feedback and avoid any misinterpretation of it.

The process approach to writing has had an important impact on feedback and response to students' writing. In fact, the process approach has encouraged researchers and practitioners to rethink thoroughly the responses given to students' writing, and has introduced the practice of multiple drafts and pre-writing activities as ways in which teachers can effectively assist students in their

writing. At all stages of the writing process, (*pre-writing, first drafting, revising, and final drafting*) student revision and teacher response have become the central point (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996: 378).

Feedback plays a particularly important role in the genre approach to teaching writing. When using findings from Paxton's research (1996) on tutor responses to student writing, Kaunda *et.al.* conclude that 'feedback on essays was one of the major opportunities students had for learning the ground rules for writing in specific disciplines' (1998:181).

Feedback can be written as well as verbal, and both are 'absolutely essential to the success of the writing consultation' (Parkerson, 2000:126). There are also various methods of giving responses to student writing, and they can either be peer group responses (often guided by teacher's instructions about what to do), or teacher-student responses. As Grabe and Kaplan (1996:387) argue, research findings indicate that peer group approaches vary in their effectiveness, depending on the extent to which:

- Students are persuaded that such approaches will lead to writing improvement;
- Students are trained to provide peer group feedback effectively;
- Students have clear goals and guidelines for peer group work; and
- Peer group members are held accountable for their feedback.

To be effective, this approach requires lecturers/teachers' thorough preparation of their students for the peer feedback task. As Grabe and Kaplan (1996:387) clearly put it,

[P]eer groups appear to be most effective when students are motivated by the approach, when they are trained carefully to carry out the group work, when they are given many suggestions and guidelines for supportive feedback, when they are assisted in giving appropriate feedback, and when the feedback provided by

them is reviewed by the teacher.

Teacher-student feedback is seen as a more traditional practice, but also includes a variety of ways of presenting feedback to students. It involves:

- Teacher whole-class discussion of major points for revision;
- Teacher demonstrations of revisions with specific student essays;
- Teacher mini-conferences in class;
- One-on-one conferences away from class;
- Written comments on essay drafts.

The choice of which option to take in feedback-giving can be motivated by various factors, some of them having to do with what is manageable with the kind of class one has, specific needs of particular groups of students and available resources.

Parkerson (2000:127-8) offers a list of points to consider when giving written feedback. She proposes that teachers should:

- Make feedback comprehensible: explicit and direct;
- Prioritise issues: as students often prioritise the aspects of their essay that they feel have received attention;
- Provide positive feedback: because as much as students need to know what it is that they are doing that is wrong, they also need to know what they are doing that is right;
- Avoid marks to rough drafts: If the purpose of the feedback is to provide input on the draft, it is better not to give a mark;
- Position feedback effectively: students find it more useful to have comments written in the margin next to where their writing calls for feedback.

CHAPTER THREE. METHODOLOGY

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the choice of research methods for this particular study, which is a qualitative study. It continues with a description and discussion of features of the data collection process, and concludes with a description and discussion of the approaches to data analysis that were adopted.

3.1 Qualitative research

As Strauss (1990:19) puts it, 'the nature of the research problem determines the kind of research to do'. This research takes a qualitative approach to the investigation of assessment practices in regard to students' written work in first year English modules at two universities (Wits and NUR). As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) quoted in Starfield (1999:133) state, '[Q]ualitative research uses a range of methods and involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter'. The value of interpretation is also emphasised by Gillham who notes that 'facts do not speak for themselves-someone has to speak for them' (2000:10). This point was considered very important as I had to interpret the data from different sources to reach the findings presented in the research report.

3.2 Case study

Case study, as defined by Robson (1993:146), is 'a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence'. The use of a case study to understand a phenomenon is also discussed by Knobel and Lankshear (1999:96) who argue that, 'a chief purpose of case study is to better understand a phenomenon'. In this research, the case study helps to understand the phenomenon of how assessment of academic writing is conducted in the two modules offered at Wits and at NUR.

Also, Knobel and Lankshear (1999:96) argue that 'case studies should enable

the reader to make comparisons with similar or relevant cases in their own fields of experience in order to transfer understanding and apply findings from this study to his or her situation'. This study may be useful for practitioners in a range of tertiary institutions should they decide to draw on the findings to reflect on their own assessment practices in relation to writing. Knobel and Lankshear (1999) distinguish between two types of design for teacher-research, being *single case design*, investigating a single bounded phenomenon, and multiple case designs, investigating more than a single case for comparative or cumulative purposes.

This study considers two cases in order to see how the same phenomenon (the teaching and assessment of academic writing) is understood and implemented in each case. It is an instance of 'educational case study' as defined by Bassey (1999: 59), who sees educational research as 'a critical inquiry aimed at informing educational judgements and decisions in order to improve educational action'. In fact, findings from this research might have an influence on some practitioners' actions in regard to the way they plan and implement the assessment of their students' written work.

There are various types of case study and Yin (1989), quoted in Robson (1993:160), distinguishes between two versions of the single case study on the basis of the level of the unit of analysis. He argues that 'A study where the concern remains at a single, global level is referred to as HOLISTIC.' Yin also argues that 'although 'holistic' may be typically how a case study of an individual would be viewed, it would also apply to the study of an institution which remained global rather than seeking to look at and analyse the different functioning of separate sub-units within the institution' (Robson, 1993:160-161). This case study is not holistic as it considers sub-units within the two universities. Robson also refers to 'multiple case studies', where in a study more than a single case is investigated.

Bassey (1999:58) presents three types of educational case study being: theory-

seeking and theory-testing case studies, story telling picture-drawing case studies, and evaluative case studies. The present case study is close to both theory-seeking and theory-testing case studies, and evaluative case studies. As Bassey (1999:58) argues, theory-seeking and theory-testing case studies aim to lead to fuzzy propositions or fuzzy generalizations and convey these, their context and evidence leading to them to interested audience. This case study, by exploring what assessment practices are adopted by practitioners in different contexts, is close to the theory seeking and theory-testing case studies as described by Bassey (1999). In fact, the study looks at the theories of assessment used by lecturers, tries to see which ones are more effective, and in doing so, it also establishes a kind of evaluation as it suggests what might help in the effective teaching of academic writing. The study also intends to reveal those practices to interested audiences, which, in this case might be lecturers and students at both universities and in other tertiary institutions.

To address the research question(s), the research investigates two different cases at two different institutions of higher education. It is also a specific case study of two different modules, the 'Foundation in English Language' module at the University of the Witwatersrand and 'Writing English I' at the National University of Rwanda, in order to better understand how assessment of writing is done.

Silverman (2000:233) argues that 'In writing up research, we tell (structured) stories about data'. It is indeed useful to know what kinds of data one needs to collect in order to address specific questions. In this study, the decision to collect various kinds of data was motivated by the nature of questions to be addressed. The following sections provide a brief account of the nature of the research data, how it was gathered, with whom, and the data analysis procedures that were chosen.

3.3 Research subjects

Research subjects are students and lecturers at both the University of the Witwatersrand and the National University of Rwanda, and were chosen as follows:

(i) Three different lecturers teaching the 'Foundation in English Language: Module 1' at Wits, and two lecturers teaching 'Writing English I' at NUR. This choice was purely based on who teaches the modules considered in the study. Four lecturers were teaching the 'Foundation module' at Wits, but one was a visiting lecturer and I preferred to work with permanent lecturers in case additional information would be needed after the visiting lecturer had left. The two lecturers at NUR were permanent.

(ii) A group of six students (two 'top', two 'average', and two 'weak') were selected from each lecturer's group, on the basis of performance in the first assignment for the semester. It is important to mention here that I was aware of the fact that the first assignment was not enough to determine who was weak or strong. I had, however to have a criterion for choosing my research subject and it seemed fair for me to take all the three performances (top, average and weak) This made a group of eighteen students at Wits, and twelve students at the NUR.

3.4 Data collection process

'[C]ollecting data is collecting information that relates to your enquiry, information that you believe will respond to your research question' (Freeman, 1996:90). It is with this idea in mind that a set of data was collected for this study. Two main kinds of data were gathered: (i) artefacts comprised of assignment and examination tasks as well as students' marked assignments and examination scripts. (ii) audio tape-recorded one-on-one semi-structured interviews with lecturers, and focus group interviews with students at both universities. (The

questions used in the interviews are included in Appendix F.) The reasons for choosing these kinds of data are outlined below.

3.4.1 Artefacts (written documents)

Artefacts were collected to get information that interviews would not reveal. They were also collected in order to be used to triangulate what was said (in the interviews) and what was done in real situations (what was noticed on the scripts). A total of four marked assignments were collected from students at Wits, and two major marked assignments were collected from students at NUR. For all the assignments, corresponding tasks set by lecturers were also collected. One marked examination was collected from each group of students at both Universities.

3.4.2 Interviews

'Interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:645). The function of interviews is also described by Best and Kahn (1998:255) who state that 'interviews are used 'to gather information regarding an individual's experiences and knowledge; his/her opinions, beliefs, and feelings; and demographic data'. Interviews were therefore used to get both lecturers' and students' opinions, beliefs, feelings about the way the assessment of writing is conducted. In other words, the interviews aimed at understanding their experiences of assessment.

According to Knobel and Lankshear '[I]nterviews and discussions are key data collection strategies in case study research' (1999:97). They also argue that '[I]nterviews are valuable for accessing participants' opinions, beliefs, values, literacy practices and shared learning experiences' (Knobel and Lankshear, 1999:97). In this specific study, I believe interviews were a good and reliable way

of obtaining appropriate data to address the main research question.

In order to understand the way lecturers and students participate in the assessment practices of academic writing, their beliefs and feelings about how assessment can contribute to learning, two kinds of interviews were conducted: semi-structured individual interviews with lecturers, and semi-structured focus group interviews with students.

3.4.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used in order to leave room for me to get additional information from different individuals by asking additional questions when judged necessary. As defined by Robson, semi-structured interviews are those for which 'the interviewer has worked out a set of questions in advance, but is free to modify their order based upon her perception of what seems more appropriate in the context of the 'conversation' (1993:231). He also argues that in semi-structured interviews the interviewer can change the way questions are ordered, give explanations, and leave out particular questions, which seem inappropriate with a particular interviewee or include additional ones. This kind of interview was judged appropriate to my data collection because, dealing with respondents in different contexts of teaching and learning, it was more likely that additional questions would be added to the core list to get specific information appropriate to a specific context.

Semi-structured interviews were preferred because of their effectiveness in similar kinds of studies. In his article 'feedback as a two-bullock cart: a case of teaching writing' Dheram (1995:162) asserts that 'semi-structured interviews give the researcher an opportunity to elicit information, and the respondent freedom to throw light on issues the researcher might otherwise have overlooked'. This was proven to be true in the data collection when students, especially, added information by raising issues I had not thought of including into the list of

questions prepared for them.

3.4.2.2 Focus group interviews

Stewart and Shamdasani argue that, '[A]lthough focus group research can produce quantitative data, focus groups almost always are conducted with the collection of qualitative data as their primary purpose' (1990:120). Also, a 'focused interview is an approach which allows people's views and feelings to emerge, but which gives the interviewer some control' (Robson, 1993:240). In using focus group interviews, I wanted to let research subjects express their views and feelings about assessment practices.

Greenbaum (1998:1) argues that '[M]ost people who do qualitative research would classify focus groups into three different types: full groups, minigroups, and telephone groups'. A full group focus group as defined by Greenbaum 'consists of a discussion of approximately 90 to 120 minutes, led by a trained moderator, involving 8 to 10 person who are recruited for the session' (1998:2). He also defines a mini group as essentially the same as a full group, except that it generally contains 4 to 6 persons.

Focus group interviews in this study were mini group interviews and were conducted with five to six students from the same group, that is, taught by the same lecturer. This was done to stimulate participation (in the discussion) of different students, even those who are not very confident in expressing themselves in English. The interviews were conducted as planned apart from a group of six students from one lecturer's class who were not interviewed due to lack of time as it was during the examination period and respondents were not available. However, their lecturer was interviewed and their marked assignments as well as their examination papers were used in the document analysis.

3.4.3 Research ethics

As the research involved human subjects, the issue of ethics had to be addressed. Permission to collect the artefacts was requested and obtained from lecturers and individual students (see Appendices, B and C). Also, permission to audiotape record interviews with the research participants was obtained from research participants (see Appendices B and C). Students and lecturers were guaranteed anonymity if they did not wish to be named in the research report. Therefore, pseudonyms and codes are used in the research report. Participants were promised that they would be informed of the outcomes of the research. An ethics clearance was applied for and obtained from the Ethics Committee of the University of the Witwatersrand.

3.5 Methods of data analysis

Data analysis is defined by Freeman (1999:90) as the process of drawing responses out of the data, or finding them in the data. Different researchers use different methods to analyse data depending on the nature of the data itself, the nature of the research question(s), and many other factors. This point is emphasized by Strauss (1990:19) when he argues that 'the nature of the research problem determines the kind of research to do'.

This research, as stated earlier, is a qualitative study. Qualitative data somehow shape the analysis conducted upon them. As Robson (1993:370) argues, 'qualitative data has no clear and accepted set of conventions for analysis corresponding to those observed with quantitative data'. This research used various methods of data collection and data analysis used by other researchers for qualitative studies.

An important step in working with tape-recorded interviews is the transcription of the taped information. The interviews were transcribed word for word, without

any intention to do a full discourse analysis, but in order to obtain an overview of the information contained in them.

As the main intention was to make sense of my interviews and the information in the artefacts, the research used content analysis. Ritchie and Lewis suggest that 'content analysis, grounded theory and policy analysing are mainly concerned with capturing and interpreting common sense, substantive meanings in the data' (2003:202).

It is believed that understanding context is important in order to understand any phenomenon, and the research considered the point made by Ritchie and Lewis that 'in content analysis both the content and the context of documents are analysed: themes are identified, with the researcher focusing on the way the theme is treated or presented and the frequency of its occurrence' (2003:202). In order to deal with the unstructured raw material from both sources of data, the research used a 'coding' technique as defined by Robson (1993:385), in order to put relevant data into categories and themes that were used in the analysis.

Code is defined as a symbol applied to a group of words to classify or categorize them (Robson, 1993:385). Codes are related to research questions, concepts and themes. Some major themes representing a category of information were identified as presented in chapter four, and they were used in the analysis. Triangulation (described in the section below) was also used to compare responses from different interviewees to the same question, and what was presented in the documents/artefacts.

The artefacts from the two institutions were analysed in relation to some key questions such as:

- How the assignment and examination tasks are set: Are they clear?

Are they scaffolded?

- Are they accompanied by clear assessment criteria?
- How the feedback is formulated: Is it clear enough to convey meaning to the students?
- Is it likely to encourage or discourage the students?

The individual interviews with lecturers were analysed in relation to the following questions:

- What according to them is important in assessment?
- What kind of feedback do they favour and why?
- What is the importance of scaffolding their task if they do so?
- What kind of feedback do they give and which kind do they think works best?
- What do they wish to improve in their assessment procedures?

The focus group interviews with students were analysed in relation to the following key questions:

- What kinds of assessment do they get and what would they prefer if they had a choice?
- Are the assignment and examination tasks accompanied by assessment criteria? If yes, are the criteria clear enough?
- How do the assessment criteria help them in responding to their tasks?
- What kind of feedback do they receive?
- When do they receive the feedback?
- How is the feedback given to them?
- How would they prefer to get the feedback?
- Do they consider the feedback for redrafting?
- How clear is the feedback to them?
- What needs to be improved?

3.6 Triangulation

'Triangulation is considered as an indispensable tool in real world inquiry' (Robson, 1993:383). In research, 'triangulation means including multiple sources of information or points of view on the phenomenon or question you are investigating' (Freeman, 1999:96). This qualitative study used triangulation as one of its tools. Robson asserts that 'triangulation is particularly valuable in the analysis of qualitative data where the trustworthiness of the data is always a worry' (1993:383).

Triangulation was used to get opinions on assessment practices from both lecturers and students. It was also used in order to validate information from various sources. The use of triangulation to validate what one finds out is explained by Freeman, who states that 'the notion of triangulation is linked to eliminating - or at least minimizing - bias in findings and thus to increasing your confidence in what you are finding as you analyse your data.'

Three types of triangulation (as defined by Freeman 1999:97), were used in this study: *data triangulation*, which makes use of several sources of data; *methodological triangulation*, which uses multiple ways to collect data, and thus to study the problem; and *theoretical triangulation*, which uses more than one perspective to analyse the data. In fact, the study collected data from different sources, and used various methods of data collection. As the nature of the data influences the way one analyses them, data were analysed from different perspectives and using different methods.

CHAPTER FOUR. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The aim of this chapter is to present the data used in the research and how it is was analysed to reach findings. It shows how raw data has been organized in order to make possible the analysis and interpretation, and presents the detailed analysis and discussion of findings.

4.1 Coding and categorization of data

The data used in this research is complex and a system of categorization and coding was needed in order to organize the analysis. As mentioned earlier, the data came from two major sources: the University of the Witwatersrand (referred to as Wits) and the National University of Rwanda (referred to as NUR).

To distinguish between lecturers and students from the two institutions, the following coding was used:

Wits L for Wits lecturer

UNR L for UNR lecturer

Wits S for Wits student

NUR S for NUR student

As there are several groups of students and several lecturers involved in the study, numbers and letters were used to distinguish between individual lecturers and individual students as shown below:

Wits LA for Wits lecturer for group A

Wits LB for Wits lecturer for Group B

Wits LC for Wits lecturer for group C

NUR LA for NUR lecturer for group A

NUR LB for NUR lecturer for group B

Students were identified in relation to their lecturers and were labelled as follows:

Wits SA1 for Wits student number one in group A followed by Wits SA2 to Wits SA6.

For students in groups B and C, the same coding system was used.

The data from the group of students taught by lecturer C at Wits consisted only of artefacts (assignments and examination scripts) as these students were not available for a focus group interview due to lack of time (It was the examination period).

At the NUR, students were also linked to their lecturers and they are presented in the analysis as follow:

NUR SA1 to NUR SA6 and NUR SB1 to NUR SB6

The same coding was used for both interview analysis and document analysis; with each analysis presented separately in this chapter.

4.2 Data from artefacts

Two major kinds of artefacts have been analysed in this research project:

- Assignment and examination tasks
- Marked assignments and examination papers

Copies of four marked major assignments were collected from each group of

students at Wits University and copies of two marked assignments were collected from each group of students at the NUR. Copies of one marked examination were collected from students at both Wits and NUR. For each assignment and examination, copies of the tasks were collected from lecturers at each university.

4.2.1 Description of assignment and examinations tasks

The first thing to mention about the examination and assignments tasks is that they were the same for all the students registered for the same module, that is, Foundation in English Language Module 1 at Wits and Writing English I at NUR. In other words, while students from each university were taught by different lecturers, they had the same assignments and examinations.

A total of four major assignments were collected from Wits. The first assignment was an autobiography, the second was a literature assignment, where students were given a text to read and answer questions related to the text. The third assignment was an argument essay where students had to read and reflect on a quotation (given to them) and write an essay supporting their position. The fourth assignment was a comparative essay, where students were asked to compare and contrast expectations and realities experienced by a selected group of first year students at Wits (including themselves) with those investigated by Moyo at the University of Zimbabwe.

At Wits the examination consisted of three sections. The first section (A) was a comparative essay, the second (B) was an argument essay, and the third section (C) focused on literature. Section A and Section C were marked out of thirty each, and Section B out of forty. Instructions were given differently for each section.

From the NUR, two major assignments were collected for analysis. In the

interviews, lecturers mentioned that there were a number of exercises given to students apart from these assignments but students did not confirm their lecturers' claim. The first assignment was a group assignment, and had three questions. Question one was about comparing time management and other resources for survival at university; question two focused on writing about strategies for devising a study timetable; and question three focused on causes of time wasting. The second assignment involved writing an application letter.

The examination paper had three questions. The first involved evaluation of the conclusion to an essay and making suggestions for improvements to it. The second question was an argument essay which required students to discuss advantages and disadvantages of watching television. The third question was about writing an application letter accompanied by a Curriculum Vitae (C.V).

4.2.2 Themes and categories identified in the artefacts

From a categorisation of themes in the artefacts (assignments and examination papers) the following themes emerged for analysis:

- Scaffolding of tasks
- Assessment criteria
- Written feedback
- Mark allocation
- Use of feedback in redrafting

4.3 The interview data

While lecturers and students at each university were interviewed separately, the themes that emerged from a categorisation of the interview data are presented as one composite list:

- Lecturers and learners' views on academic writing
- Beliefs about what helps students to become good writers
- The role of lecturers and students in academic writing
- Appreciation of feedback
- Perception of the role of feedback
 - By teachers
 - By students
- The place of self and peer assessment
- Teacher/tutor - student relationship
- Suggestions for sound assessment

4.4 Data analysis

Data have been analysed in order to reach the findings presented in separate sub sections. The analysis draws on some theories discussed in the literature and the methodology chapters and on my personal interpretation to make the data speak because 'data in their raw form do not speak for themselves' (Robson, 1993:304).

The analysis is presented in two main sections: artefacts and interviews.

4.4.1 Analysis of artefacts

This section analyses the artefacts and focuses on how assignments and examination tasks were set, and marked. In other words, it analyses the tasks given to students and how these were completed by students and the marking and written feedback of the lecturers.

4.4.1.1 Assignment and examination tasks

Designing an appropriate assessment task is an important part of the teaching process and it plays a major role in assessment practices. This point is supported by Knight (1998) when he argues that what is done in assessment gives a message to students about what they should be learning and how they should go about it. It is important to know how to design a task that will help both the assessor and the assessed to achieve their aims, which are primarily effective teaching and learning. Failing to design appropriate assessment might make the teaching practice less productive as the teacher/lecturer might not be informed of the real needs of his learners/students and therefore could miss the opportunity to provide his/her help as needed. The first part of this section analyses the artefacts from Wits and the second looks at those from NUR.

4.4.1.1.1 Scaffolding

As Maybin, Mercer and Stierer (1992: 186) argue, in the classroom scaffolding describes the 'temporary, but essential nature of the mentor's assistance' in supporting learners to carry out tasks successfully. It is important that lecturers know their role to provide students with the needed temporary help to allow them to perform their task. It is obvious that first year students need to be carefully guided towards new skills and foundation courses more than any other courses are the most appropriate tools to do so.

Foundation Module (Wits)

One of the main points considered in the analysis of the tasks was whether they were scaffolded or not. The analysis of assignments tasks at Wits revealed a clear scaffolding of many of the tasks given to students. Scaffolding refers to the support designed to assist learners to accomplish tasks. As Maybin, Mercer &

Stierer, (1992: 186) argue, in the classroom scaffolding describes the 'temporary, but essential nature of the mentor's assistance' in supporting learners to carry out tasks successfully. It is important that lecturers know their role to provide students with the needed temporary help to allow them perform their task. It is obvious that first year students need to be carefully guided towards new skills and foundation courses more than any other courses are the most appropriate tools to do so.

There is evidence of scaffolding in the design of all the tasks given to students in the Foundation module at Wits. For the first assignment, students were asked to write their autobiography. The task is divided into four steps with clear guidance for each.

The first step, *free writing*, requires students to write their ideas freely as these come to mind. They are told to write without stopping for about five minutes without worrying about grammar, spelling or neatness. In doing this, they produce ideas for their first draft.

For the second step, students are asked to *plan* their autobiography. After this, they have to refer to their spray diagram and write a draft. At this point, they are asked to try to focus on significant experiences. Here, the guidance helps them select what is most important for the autobiography.

The third step is to *write an introduction* that will arouse the reader's interest. The last step reminds the students that they are writing to be read by other people who might not have experienced what they write about. They are therefore asked to include details that make the event seem real to the reader and to give their own point of view and feelings about their experiences. They are given more guidance when told that in their autobiography they should think of their tutor and their fellow classmates, and try to help them understand who they are (from the

autobiography). This is useful advice because it is important to keep the audience in mind if one wants to produce good writing. *Who* you are writing to influences *what* you write and *how* you write it. Here the 'what' refers to the information you think a specific reader might need from your writing.

Finally, the specification of length provides a quantitative frame for the task. The scaffolding provided could contribute to students' development as writers because their tutors guide the process of finding and using 'content' for the task.

Scaffolding is also evident in the argument essay (third assignment) where students were asked to read and reflect on the following quotation by Pieterse (2000:441):

Only when women are given a sense of respect and dignity within their cultural realm, will they have the power to make demands regarding sexual intercourse, fidelity and the use of condoms (Pieterse, 2000:441)

The important aspect of scaffolding noticed in this assignment is that students were provided with issues to consider in their writing such as:

- Customary law and Constitution
- The status of men and women in customary societies
- Attitudes to sex and sexuality
- Poverty in South Africa

Offering students some aspects of the topic to consider may assist those who find it difficult to substantiate a point of view. However, one should be very careful when proposing points of reference. For example, 'Poverty in South Africa' could make students who are not from South Africa feel excluded. As some students indicated in the interviews lecturers need to take into account a range of contexts.

Another Wits assignment that was carefully scaffolded is the comparative essay, referred to as the Moyo assignment. The topic for this assignment was set as follows:

Write an essay in which you compare and contrast expectations and realities experienced by a selected group of first year students at Wits this year (including yourself) with those investigated by Moyo (1995) at the University of Zimbabwe.

This assignment was very well scaffolded because the students had opportunities to draft and redraft their essays. Their lecturers/tutors would read and give feedback, which students were expected to use in their redrafting. In this assignment, tutors have demonstrated the importance of the 'process approach to writing' as described by Grabe and Kaplan (1996:86-87) and detailed in the literature review chapter. In fact this process gives students opportunities to write more than one draft on a meaningful writing topic. The topic for the assignment was indeed very meaningful as it concerned first year students and involved the students' own experience at Wits University. This assignment was also a good introduction to writing which includes references to a written text as students were taught how to quote from a source without plagiarizing. Plagiarism being one of the challenges faced by novice in the area of academic writing, a university first year academic writing module needs to address this important issue.

Another aspect of the scaffolding process evident in the assignments given at Wits is the '*assignment planning form*'. This form (see Appendix D) helps students to plan what they are going to write about. It suggests to students that they answer the following before they begin writing:

- *Brief description of the assignment*
- *What I already know about the topic*

- *Concepts or information I must know or learn in order to complete the assignment*
- *Resources I can turn to for assistance*
- *I need to do the following in order to complete the assignment*
- *My goals for this assignment*

This plan shows how tutors helped their students to know where they were going in their assignments, what they needed in order to achieve their aim of successfully completing the assignment. This form was used by students for self-evaluation of what they achieved and what they did not achieve. This kind of support is crucial, especially for first year students who most of the time struggle to know what they need to focus on in their writing. This assignment planning can be used by students in all of their courses.

Scaffolding of tasks was also evident in the paper that Wits students wrote for their June examination. In fact, the examination consisted of tasks that students were already familiar with. As such it is an example of valid assessment as defined by Gipps (1994). A paper which required students to write in genres with which they were already familiar is likely to have assisted them to perform optimally in the stressful context of their first experience of university examinations

The examination was in three sections: Section A, 'comparative essay'; Section B 'argument essay'; and Section C literature'. These sections mirrored the three sections of the module, which introduced students to writing academic essays (comparative and argument essays) and to responding to questions from a literature text.

As was the case for the assignment tasks, the examination tasks also provided students with information to help them respond. For every question and every section, students were given specific instructions. The three sections of the paper

are discussed below.

Section A: Comparative Essay

For this task, students were asked to answer the question '*In what ways are female sex workers vulnerable to contracting HIV?*' by comparing and contrasting street workers' experiences with those of brothel workers.

This question is set in a similar way to that for the 'Moyo assignment'. Students here were asked to draw on two readings that they were given some days before the examination, and were allowed to take into the examination room in order to make their comparison.

They were given a very relevant reading for their task '*Vulnerability on the streets: female sex workers and HIV risk*' by Pyett and Warr. As students had been initiated into referring to written sources, this was an opportunity for them to do that. They were also given categories to consider in their comparison, to assist them to construct a coherently written essay. This task is a model of a scaffolded task because not only it was set in a genre familiar to students, but also it provided them with the elements needed to address it.

Section B: Argument Essay

In this section, students were given the following quotation and were required to write an essay to support their position on the issue presented in it.

Responsibility for condom use does not only rest with the sex worker in commercial transactions. Community education programmes should address men's failure to accept responsibility for condom use when seeking the services of sex workers (Pyett and Warr 1997:545-6).

It is clear that the quotation relates to the reading students were given for their

argument essay. This is an example of a fair assessment practice, as students in an examination feel more comfortable when writing about what is familiar.

For this section, students were also given additional readings to draw their supporting arguments from. (This is a good exercise about writing from sources). Students were once again given categories with which to structure their essays: gender, health, social, economic, and legal issues but were also given an opportunity to bring in any other issues they judged relevant to the case to support their stand. This makes the task an instance of a well-scaffolded task: support is provided, but there is also an opportunity to use one's own ideas.

In terms of assessing learning from the module, this task could help tutors evaluate their students' ability to use other people's writings for information and their ability to reference them correctly.

Section C: Literature

For this section, students were required to answer a question based on a story that was given in the examination. The question (Section C) is in three sections which detail what is expected from students. The questions are very clear and students are asked to support their views on a given statement, to discuss their views giving evidence from the text, and finally to write an argument in which they make their position clear and give reasons to support their stand using evidence drawn from the text.

This is a well-designed task because it comprises crucial elements that a teacher of an academic writing course needs in order to assess his or her students after having taught them how to write in response to a text. In fact, in any faculty where these students might study after the *Foundation module*, they should have a foundation for the skills needed to state, discuss, justify, and back up their

stand in relation to a range of written texts.

It is clear that assignments and examination tasks are very well scaffolded at Wits. It is, however, the 'designed-in' scaffolding that seems to be applied most frequently rather than the 'point-of-need' scaffolding which would be used in a particular context. As tasks are the same for all the groups of students, it is clear that no assignment was set to meet particular needs of a group of students as suggests the 'point-of-need' scaffolding (Sharpe, 2001).

Writing English I (NUR)

At NUR, analysis of the way tasks were set both for assignments and examinations in the *Writing English I* module, and an analysis of how tasks were presented to students, reveals a quite different situation to that at Wits

The first important difference consists in the fact that there is no single typed task for every student at NUR as is the case at Wits. Assignment and examination tasks were either written on the chalkboard or dictated to students. This might be due to insufficient resources. In fact, at NUR, only a few lecturers have computers in their offices, and the few available printers are kept in the Faculty secretary's office. This appears to be a quite challenging procedure for students who might need to refer to the way the task is set while doing it, that is, to keep an eye on what is required and on the assessment criteria in order to know what the assessment will be based on.

In contrast to Wits where assignment and examination tasks were well scaffolded and clearly presented, at NUR students were given tasks without clear guidance on how to respond to them. Most of their assignments were completed once and marked without students having an opportunity to redraft. The two major assignments are the only ones students completed. The nature of the tasks in

each assignment is different and shows that students were not given a chance to redraft the same assignment. In the interviews lecturers indicated that they did not have time to mark the same work more than once. It is, however, difficult to imagine how first year students can be expected to improve if they do not have opportunities to revise their writing.

In addition to that, the assignments tasks do not show any focus on some important aspects of academic writing like quoting and referencing. It is even noticed from lecturers' comments that no consistent remark or feedback was given to students in relation to their referencing. One can therefore wonder how these lecturers address the issue of plagiarism very crucial in teaching academic writing. As the genre approach to writing (as defined by Archer 2000) consists of equipping students with writing skills they can use in various disciplines, the role of this module to prepare students for writing in different fields remains questionable. The process approach to writing is also not applied in the Writing English I module as there is no proof of its important aspect presented by Grabe and Kaplan (1996) as a positive innovation allowing teachers and students more meaningful interaction and more purposeful writing.

Dheram argues that '[F]eedback seems to be as central to the process of teaching and learning writing as revision is to the process of writing' (1995:160). The revision process (considered as crucial while teaching writing) was neglected at NUR and students in the focus group complained about not having enough writing exercises. This lack of opportunity for 'practice' was also evident in the kinds of assignments that students at NUR were given, as detailed below.

The first assignment, which was a group work task, had three questions without any other instruction provided.

In your group, discuss how you can manage your time for your success. You should get inspired by your academic life.

The lack of guidance resulted in different understandings of the task and different groups of students produced quite different work in response to the task. As one can see in students' written assignments (see Appendix E), each group had a particular way of responding. Some submitted an outline of their work; others had put the information to be developed in tables. A well-scaffolded task would have given instructions to guide students and, although their writing would have been different in some of its details there should have been some common points as a result of responding to the same instructions or assessment criteria.

The second assignment involved writing a job application letter. Students were given instructions about what the letter should include, like full address of the addressee and addressor, the position (place) they are applying for, and their qualification.

Write a one page job application letter in which you specify the following:

-Your full address

-The address of who the letter is addressed to

-The place you are applying for

-Your qualification and your experience.

Provide any other information you think might help you get the job you are applying for.

The task for this assignment was more clearly set than the first one. Also, some scaffolding was provided in regard to content. This guidance helped students to understand what to do, and it is clear from their assignments that they had more or less the same understanding of the task.

The NUR examination paper had three questions, only one of which was related to what the students had done in their assignments. The first task involved evaluating a conclusion given to them in order to demonstrate the weaknesses

and write an improved version. This task was not similar to anything they had done in their assignments. While such a task has value in a writing module, it does not seem a valid form of summative assessment, in a course where students have not been introduced to and guided through a similar task.

The second task was an argument essay, which consisted of discussing advantages and disadvantages of watching television. This kind of task is important when preparing students to discuss and justify their stand. It is valuable in a context in which students have an opportunity to receive feedback. However, it is not a valid form of summative assessment if students have not been prepared for such a task.

Unfortunately, in the writing module at NUR, assignment and examination tasks were not clearly connected. There is no evidence of scaffolding in its two aspects, 'designed-in', and 'point-of-need' as outlined by Sharpe (2001).

4.4.1.1.2 *Instructions and assessment criteria*

It can be argued that both the assessor and the assessed need to work with assessment criteria. 'It seems fairer and more reasonable that students should know what it is they're trying to achieve, rather than these things being secret and hidden within the mind of the marker' (Brown and Knight, 1994:102). The assessed needs to know on what basis his/her work will be evaluated, and the assessor needs some points to refer to while evaluating the work. In addition to that, the assessor sets the assessment criteria in relation to what he/she needs to know about the student's progress in order to guide effective learning experiences. These criteria, in turn help the student in guiding him/her towards the requirements of the assessment. If one works in relation to assessment criteria, the possibility of meeting the expectations of the assessor is enhanced. In other words, assessment criteria clarify the task for the student. They also help the assessor (in this case lecturer/teacher/tutor) to check how effective his/her

teaching has been.

Assessment criteria were accorded an important role by lecturers at Wits, but they were accorded considerably less importance at NUR as can be noticed on both assignment and examination tasks.

As noted in relation to the tasks set for the 'Writing English I' module, assessment criteria were non-existent for all tasks. Students were never told how their work would be assessed, that is, on the basis of what criteria their work would be evaluated. With the exception of the job application letter, they were not given clear instructions on how to approach their tasks. Lack of instructions and assessment criteria was one of the main complaints these students expressed in the focus group interview.

The issue of equity and fairness is difficult to address if students' work is not judged according to the same criteria. While 'objectivity' in assessment of essays is probably impossible to achieve, assessment criteria are likely to assist lecturers to mark objectively. In the 'Foundation in English' module, assessment criteria were part of assignments three and four and they were clearly stated for all three sections of the examination paper. For assignment three, the argument essay, the criteria are specified in three categories as follow:

Your essay will be marked on the basis of the following criteria:

1. Understanding of academic conventions and concepts

- *Claims must be based on appropriate academic evidence from the course readings.*
- *Your own position must be clear*
- *You should show understanding of concepts*

2. Organisation

- *A clear introduction stating your position and outlining the stages of your*

argument

- *A conclusion which highlights the main claims*
- *Logical and coherent presentation of the arguments*

3. *Language use*

- *Well-structured sentences and paragraphs*
- *Use of clear cohesive devices*
- *Varied and accurate vocabulary*

Length: 2-3 pages.

The pattern followed in the assessment criteria: understanding, organisation and language, was familiar to Wits students as they were introduced to it for each of the essays they wrote.

The fourth assignment, the 'Moyo assignment', was accompanied by very detailed assessment criteria. There was a two page form clarifying assessment criteria for this comparative essay, and it was used by lecturers in their marking (see Appendix D). This form is a model of assessment criteria for an essay of this kind as it states clearly what will be considered in assessing the different parts of the essay: introduction, body and conclusion. It also refers to the use of language, the presentation, skills and legibility. These criteria demonstrate that the task was scaffolded, providing students with the guidance needed to understand what they were required to do. For example, the assessment criteria state that a good introduction does justice to the following main points:

1. *Makes topic and purpose of essay clear*
2. *Identifies the source(s) of information*
3. *Outlines the essay plan/structure*

4.4.1.1.3 Marks allocation

Mark allocation is an important aspect of assessment as it is from those marks that some important decisions (like promoting students to next levels, deciding on who will get a job after a test, etc.) are made. Specifying the mark for each section of an assignment or an examination is also important in that it helps the assessor to address the issue of equity while marking.

Students can also decide to devote more effort to sections that are accorded a higher proportion of the mark. This is important in situations when students think that they do not have enough time to do all the tasks in their tests or examinations. In these cases, they may choose to work strategically and start with the sections allocated the most marks.

Mark allocation is an aspect of assessment which shows what the assessor considers most important. It is obvious that more marks will be given to tasks that are judged more demanding than others. In giving different marks to different tasks, the assessor directs students' efforts.

Although mark allocation is an important aspect of assessment, some lecturers/tutors seem to neglect it when setting tasks. An analysis of different tasks from the NUR 'Writing English 1' module revealed that no mark allocations were given. Tasks were set and students were not informed of what mark would be allocated to different tasks. This explains a point they made in the focus group interview by an NUR student:

...I can't know what will be considered by the lecturer when he marks. That is why I can't know more or less which mark I will get. I just wait until they show us the mark (NUR S A 2).

This suggests that lecturers who do not give any assessment criteria or mark allocation contribute to student uncertainty and, perhaps, anxiety, about task requirements.

At Wits there was an interesting distinction between assignments for which marks were allocated within tasks and those to which a global mark was allocated. For the literature tasks and for the literature section of the examination paper, marks were allocated to each section of the answer, whereas for the assignments and the sections of the examination paper that required essay writing, a global mark was given. In my view, the allocation of marks to particular assignment criteria could assist students in responding to feedback on their work. As advised by Starfield, '[S]tudents should be aware of what constitutes adequate, good and excellent performance in any course' (2000:104).

4.4.2 Written feedback on students' assignments and exam papers

The assessment literature emphasises the importance of feedback in assessment (Brown and Knight 1994, Knight 1998, Dherma 1995, Starfield 2000). Written feedback given to students in the two modules that are the focus of this research was analysed in relation to the following main points:

- How is it structured?
- Where is it placed (in the body of the task or at the end)?
- Is it detailed or general?
- Is it related to the requirements of the task?

The choice of questions to consider was motivated by the five points Parkerson (2000:127-8) proposes about 'written feedback to student essays' (as earlier cited in the literature review)

Feedback has also been analysed per individual group of students in order to

investigate whether individual lecturers have particular ways of giving feedback. A general observation on written feedback in the 'Foundation module' at Wits is that it is more detailed on assignments than on examination papers. This may be due to the fact that students do not have the same access to examination papers as they do to their assignments. As written feedback is meant to guide students in their future writing, it is logical that time spent on writing feedback on examination papers would be time wasted. However, considering that the primary aim of written feedback is to help students in their learning process, one might wonder why in the 'Foundation module' these examination papers are not made available for students to review their errors and learn from them, or to simply appreciate how successful their learning has been.

The feedback written on the examination paper at Wits is meant to indicate to the external examiner why a given lecturer gave a particular mark. This explains the difference in the nature of feedback given to assignments (meant to help students improve their work) and those given to examinations (which students do not have access to).

4.4.2.1 Feedback from Wits LA

Here is some of the feedback used the most by this lecturer on students' examination papers:

- Reference?*
- Repetition*
- Unclear, muddled*
- No clear categories/ categories not clearly defined*
- Has not used course readings*
- How?*
- Evidence?*
- Not really*

- Incorrect
- Interesting approach
- Unconvincing, insufficient evidence
- Moves across categories,
- Not logical
- Not relevant
- Wrong category
- No proper introduction
- Good intro
- Oh!

Most of the feedback was put next to the part being commented on and a general feedback was put at the end of each section of the examination, as they appear below:

- Has not used course readings
- Uses Campbell + compares across groups but not enough detail about vulnerability
- Language unclear, doesn't draw on other readings. Too close to the text, so quotes are unclear
- Attempts arguments with some reasonable points, but language sometimes unclear
- No clear structure/categories. Does not answer the question

Some of the examination scripts do not have comments or feedback, or have just one word although the mark given shows that the task was well or not well performed. This reveals that lecturers do not bother writing feedback on examination papers.

At Wits, feedback to essays and other assignments written throughout the semester is more detailed and more instructional. It shows the intention of the lecturer to communicate with the students in order to help them improve. The following are examples of such feedback:

- Give the full, correct essay topic
- Mention the categories you will use
- Put all words quoted in quotation marks
- This is a well organised and clearly written essay in which you use the language of comparison well.
- With whom?, found where? When?; What about the comparison?; Reference details?; Evidence? Be more specific. This needs explanation; Good topic sentence
- But Moyo says nothing about money or finances! How well did you read this?
- Source of this quote?
- Is this is a quote? If so, reference it.
- This word is used within a sentence or when different parts of a comparison are mentioned in the same sentence. But not at the beginning of a sentence that deals with only one half of the comparison. (The student had used the word 'whereas' at the beginning of the sentence)
- Is there any significance to this finding? Did it affect the students at all?
- You need to make some comparison correctly here-not just to list the interview in the same sub category.
- This introduction needs to be larger to indicate the categories you will use
- All of these points need to be more logical, grouped into categories and sub categories
- You are just listing and summarising points. Try to select points that allow you to make a comparison with the information from different sources

These comments indicate that in feedback on written assignments lecturers give instructions and guidance to their students. In many instances, the lecturer's comments are restated at the end of the essays as a kind of summarised feedback, which makes it easier for the student to understand or interpret the feedback for the next draft as in these three examples from **Wits LA**:

(i)

The information you provide when you quote from the story is relevant and answers the questions to some extent. But, these quotes should be used as evidence to support the explanations and answers you give in your own words.

This feedback gives more guidance than the comments from lecturer B: *No clear evidences, use your own words.*

(ii)

You have interesting points to make but:

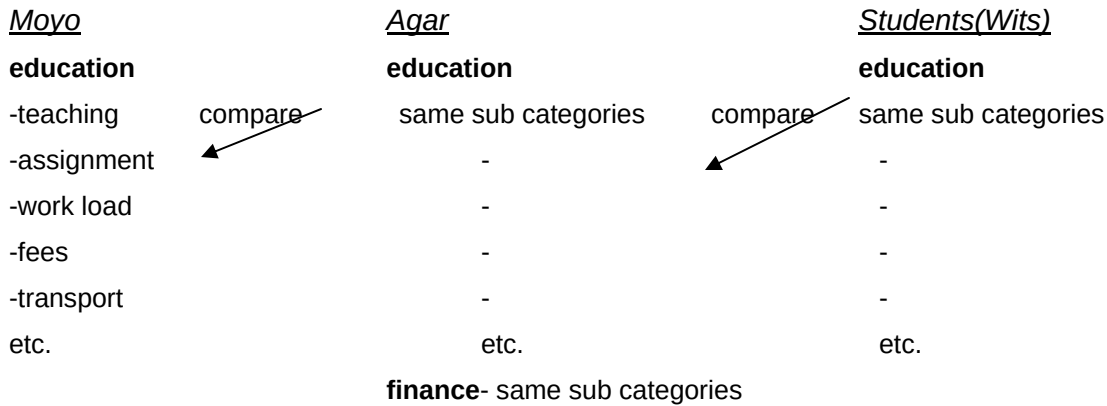
- You have not grouped your points into logical categories and sub categories, so the points are muddled.*
- You need to deal with each category in a separate paragraph*
- You need to introduce each paragraph/category with a generalisation or topic sentence*
- You need to make direct comparison even if you are using model*
- You need to use the language of comparison*

This feedback provided at the end of the student's essay gives clear guidance as to what should be done. It outlines the requirements at each stage of the essay. If the student responds to the feedback in the next draft, it is likely that the essay would improve considerably. This is an example of feedback to scaffold the learning process. This essay was marked 14/30, and the written feedback justifies the mark allocated to it as the lecturer shows clearly how the student has not done justice to many of the requirements of the assignment.

The lecturer (Wits LA) sometimes suggests solutions to students' problems. On one copy, the general feedback is accompanied by an example of what the student ought to do:

(iii)

You do not organise the points into relevant sub-categories that you can compare & so you make hardly any comparison & your essay turns into a list of unconnected points collected into larger categories. You need to select points that you can compare in all the three sources of information. E.g.



In this feedback the illustration clarifies what the general feedback might have failed to convey. I believe that for feedback to be effective, lecturers need to put themselves into their students' shoes and think of how well they can interpret the ideas they try to convey. The example of this lecturer is one way to help students interpret feedback.

4.4.2.2 Feedback from Wits LB

The aim of analysing the written feedback from individual lecturers separately was to identify any positive differences in practice that might be useful to others. The analysis of the feedback given by **Wits LB** to students' assignments shows that there is a difference in the ways the two lecturers (Wits LA and Wits LB) convey messages to their students.

Wits LB had almost the same way of marking assignments and examination papers but there was as much feedback on examination papers as there was on assignments. Here are examples from the examination papers:

- *doesn't say anything about risk*
- *illogical, repetitive*
- *not descent quote*

- does not show reference to question
- does not much with quotes to put forth an argument
- poor referencing
- does not answer the question related to comparison and risk
- odd argument-justifies Philemon, doesn't really answer question
- fairly well argued
- literal
- evidence
- no!
- relevance?
- not a good conclusion
- appropriate points doesn't link them to answer question
- clear, logic
- doesn't use other readings; clearly structured+evidence provided for points raised
- off the point, not answering question
- does not really deal with position taken
- difficult to read, no comparison, no proper referencing, illegible!
- language informal
- not enough comparison between 2 groups of sex workers
- muddled,??
- too many generalised statements, not detailed comparison
- patchy-use of quotes as evidence sometimes highly appropriate sometimes not. Key problem is that risk is never mentioned

Examination of the feedback on assignments indicates very similar comments:

- you haven't elaborated
- use own words
- handwriting difficult to read. Use a darker pen & write bigger
- some improvement but still a way to go
- continue here with Agar
- incorrect references
- run-on sentences/ sentence too long

- do not ever leave out a question, even if you are not sure of the answer*
- leave a gap for a new paragraph*
- say what you are going to say*
- nice intro*
- highlight main points. Say what you've said*
- excellent!*
- well done*
- excellent(.....)you are a star!*
- watch sentence punctuation*
- you should highlight key issue in the conclusion*
- signal categories*
- mixed categories buildings*
- this is not a social life*
- no heading in an essay*
- nice essay*
- fluent and generally coherent (...)*
- conclusion needs elaboration & a separate paragraph*
- a pleasing improvement (....)*
- this is a remarkable story (.....) keep up that reading!*
- you need to comment here about why this point is relevant to this essay topic*
- work on paragraph coherence*

Wits LB's feedback is less instructional than that of Wits LA. There are more remarks than guidance towards improvement of students' writing. First year students are novices in the area of academic writing and may need more help in order to be able to produce good academic writing. Pointing out their weaknesses might be a waste of time if there are not suggestions for improvement.

However, the lecturer tried in some instances to give a kind of summarised feedback that seems more complex than that written in the body of different tasks and essays. An analysis of feedback on different students' assignments shows

that some similar mistakes were not signalled in the same way. On some assignments there was detailed feedback while on others only the mistake was pointed out. As written feedback is given to help students interpret and understand on their own, lecturers/tutors need to provide detail and to treat all students' work in the same way. The following are some instances of summarised feedback given by **Wits LB** to some students:

1

More careful structuring is needed for your second draft

- distinguish between broad categories and sub categories*
- Signal each broad category at the beginning of a paragraph*
- Synthesize Moyo, Agar & your data more carefully*
- Use more direct quotes from all three sources*
- Referencing not correct*

2

-You need to work on paragraph coherence

-Synthesis of Agar, Moyo, your interview data also needs attention in the 2nd draft

3

-Some interesting data - quote directly from your respondents

-Synthesis of 3 sources is not bad

-Give more details from your respondents

4

Your essay is fluent +well written. But, you need to be more precise & specific throughout

- more direct quotes needed*
- you did not use Agar at all*
- Your respondents' views were not dealt with individually because you generalized your data*

These summarized comments/feedback not only help the students understand

better what they should have done, but also justify the mark that is allocated to the work. It is hard for a student who has not understood the weaknesses in his or her work to accept that he/she deserves a low mark. This is a weakness found in some of Wits LB's marking as some of the assignments are marked 17/30 or 15/30 and yet do not have clear comments written on them.

4.4.2.3 Feedback from Wits LC

Wits LC had a quite similar way of marking to **Wits LA** in many instances. They both give different kinds of feedback to assignments and examination papers in terms of quantity and content. In fact, the feedback found on examination papers is not as detailed as that on assignments. The short general feedback put at the end of each section of the examination paper seemed to be meant to help in the marking process; that is, they appear as a kind of recapitulation of what was found in the whole task. Most of her comments on exam papers appear as follows:

-no mention of unsafe sexual practices

-misunderstood

-doesn't talk about risk

-long sentence

-mismatch in quote

-no categories /sub categories

-language is clumsy but essay structured; attempt to use Campbell

-muddled, little evidence, some speculation

-insufficiently supported

-misreading of articles especially with regards to health lifestyle

-quotes problems, no enough detailed comparison

-not quite answering the question

-makes an argument, some substantiation, no quotes

-quotation marks missing but good answer

These are
kinds of
end of task

feedback

-some blending of 'Campbell' to make points fit
-careless language mistakes!
-draws on a number of readings & provides evidence to make points well structured



It is clear that **Wits LC** prefers to give more comments at the end of each task than she does throughout the task marking. Here, I think the intention is not to show students what they did or did not do well (as they do not see the examination copies); it is instead to share with the external examiner (who monitors the examination) the marker's impression on the work.

I also understood that such feedback was put at the end of the task to help the assessor decide on the mark to give as it appears as a kind of summary of what was not done appropriately.

The marking of assignments is more detailed and this lecturer gives considerable guidance to her students. She also has an assignment criteria form and a feedback handout form that she took time to fill in for her students. This was also done by Wits LA but not by Wits LB.

In her summarised comments at the end of each task, the lecturer for group C demonstrated a good application of the PQE technique (Praise, Question and Encourage), as suggested by Lipp and Davis-Ockey (1997). She also took time to summarize the main comments on each assignment to help the student understand. Examples of the written feedback found on students' assignments are as follows:

-where does she say this
- quote Agar
-you need another sentence here for your intro
-this is not a research per se

- why a capital letter
- reference
- sentence construction
- evidence
- unclear
- what is the topic for this sentence?
- explain what you mean by this
- write it in full first time you mention it
- this quote doesn't make sense
- no slang!
- what makes these more important than other universities?
- completely inappropriate
- check quote. It does not make sense
- how can you contrast this with Moyo?
- you mix 2 ideas here
- this is the newspaper article, not the author's opinion
- this is not a direct quote. You just paraphrased.
- no headings in an essay
- add expectations vs reality
- you never mentioned this in the essay, so, you can't introduce it in the conclusion.
- good use of other readings
- how does this link with argument?
- you need to reference the evidence you provide. Be careful of generalisations you can't support.
- this can be split into paragraphs when you add evidence to support the comparison you are making.
- incorporate Agar. This section needs to be expanded +discussed in far more details.

These comments given by Wits LC are clearly expressed and many of them suggest what students can do to improve. This is important because the role of tutors is not just to show students what is wrong, but it is also to help them to improve. This lecturer always summarised her feedback at the end of the assignment and most of the summaries suggest solutions to specific problems

noticed in the students' assignments. Some instances of these summarising comments are provided here:

1

- (...) this is an improvement. The structure is good –you have used all the sources. Try to quote more thought especially from the students you interviewed and use all the interviewees to show they all felt before you give the examples.

-You did well worked as evidence I'm pleased with this

2

-A conclusion should be a short summary of the points you raised here; lots of similarities and differences

3

-You need to manage your time better so you finish the essay. This essay's structure is not always clear. Use the headings given in the question to help you answer the question so you don't repeat yourself. Also, be careful of too many incomplete sentences

4

- WSB 2, you need to do some work on structuring this essay. Sometimes it is not clear what you mean.

5

- This is a much better essay than the first one. You need to be systematic, work out what you need to do for the essay and then make sure you apply it to each paragraph.

6

-This isn't a formal conclusion. Here you need to say what you find generally in each category and something that makes an overall statement about how students are prepared for first year.

7

-WSB1, you improve with each essay you write. This essay is structured and you try to

use evidence to support your point. Carry on like this for the exam!

8

-WSB3, your work has improved a lot. Just make sure you say what the topic is from the beginning.

9

-WSB1, well organised, the biggest thing you need to concentrate on is content in the paragraphs. They are long, break them up to deal more fully with each sub category so you can explain whether there are mismatches between expectations/reality in subcategories.

10

-WSB1, I am pleased with this! You have done well in integrating the three sources +structuring.

At NUR, written feedback is given in the same way for both assignments and examinations. This is explained by the fact that students are supposed to see their examination papers and ask for clarifications if needed before their marks are recorded in the Faculty. However, not all lecturers do this and some complain about lack of time to mark the examinations in the limited time given to them. The following section gives a detailed analysis of the nature of feedback lecturers at NUR give to their students.

4.4.2.4 Feedback from NUR L A

Feedback given by this lecturer emphasized grammar and spelling. In both assignments and examination papers aspects of the work that needed improvement were indicated but where a spelling mistake was pointed out, the correct word was given. In many instances, the lecturer added or deleted a word in the students' text but without explanation of the correction. Some of the written comments given by NUR LA on students' assignments appear as follows:

- how proficient are you?
- explain
- of what?
- awkward (this observation was found on the work of many students)
- inaccurate!
- Unacceptable innovations!
- unnecessary
- tense

In some instances, grammatical mistakes were underlined or circled to draw them to the attention of the student. On the examination papers, comparatively more details were provided in the feedback. This practice does not accord with a key objective of feedback which is to help students improve their writing, because after doing the examination, students are not likely to go back to their writing in order to improve. This is a reason why more comments should be given in the feedback on assignments than on exam papers. Some of the written comments given on examination papers are as follows:

- two verbs that follow each other?
- you are making mistakes instead of correcting them!!
- yours is full of mistakes
- no, the original was better
- no! a good conclusion should instead echo the thesis statement and repeat the supporting topic sentences rather than dealing with completely new ideas.
- your conclusion seems to make a new point.
- where is the example for the 2nd case?
- you should improve the paragraph by changing the ideas. (see the supporting topic sentences)not the language.
- which is the revised paragraph among the three you've produced? You repeat almost all the mistakes.
- why this space?

Some of these comments suggest that the lecturer's focus is on the importance of content but others focus on language. Some other comments are:

- is this the work you are applying for? See your application letter.*
- this is not the right place to specify enclosed info. It should come at the end.*
- who is the person to contact?*
- this section should follow the reverse chronological order.*
- the two titles can't follow each other.*
- this should rather be included in your introduction.*
- have you finished? You haven't yet developed how lack of experience causes problems to new comers.*
- do your supports really show how TV programs can cheer us up?*
- your ideas are mixed up!*
- briefly introduce the different supporting topic sentences!*
- contracted forms are not good in formal writing.*
- good essay on the whole.*

This lecturer tried to clarify some points and she also showed the students how the vocabulary used was inappropriate by showing in which context it should be used as this example illustrates:

Student's mistake: Also we can withdraw any conclusion...

Lecturer's example: you draw a conclusion

You draw a picture

You withdraw money from a bank

You withdraw from a discussion

You withdraw from a front line, etc.

This is a commendable practice in assessment as it not only indicates the mistake, but also aims to extend students' knowledge of the language they are learning.

Although very rarely done, this lecturer seemed to encourage her students as in the following example:

-The technical aspect is OK, make an effort to write clear sentences and use appropriate punctuation.

In general, this lecturer's feedback could be useful to students. Although the comments are not summarized at the end of each task to guide the students for the future, individual students could interpret the instances of feedback and use it to improve their writing.

4.4.2.5 Feedback from NUR LB

The nature of feedback from this lecturer is similar to that of NUR LA. Both give more detailed feedback on examination papers than on assignments. This lecturer gave greatest importance to grammar and spelling. In an academic literacy module, it is questionable that surface language should be given as much attention as content and deep structure. Dheram (1995:160) expresses concern that '[L]anguage teachers still seem to focus on surface-level errors'. Unfortunately, this observation is still valuable eleven years later in various domains of language teaching. If we look at the comments written on NUR LB's students' assignments we find observations like:

-when?

-some careless mistakes!

-shame

-good

-this is only one detail among others. Why do you choose this one only?

-spelling!

These comments are written on students' assignments, where comments on

deep structure and content are needed in order to help students build on what they have written. Instead, NUR LB is more specific in his feedback on examination papers, (which might not be of much help) as these examples show:

-This should come under its own heading 'publications' if you decide to include it. Remember that only the relevant information to the job you are applying for should be included in your CV. Others can be left out.

This is quite useful information for the student who had included unneeded information or put it in the wrong place. He/she can refer to it every time he/she writes a CV to accompany an application letter. Lecturers need to keep in mind their students' needs, not only for the course being taught, but also for their learning in other contexts within and beyond the university. This, in fact is the aim of the genre approach to writing as defined by Archer (2000) and Angélil-Carter (2000).

Some other comments of NUR LB's on examination scripts indicate concern for language, content and organisation:

-Inappropriate tenses!

-Example to support

-Is this the way you could correct it?

-Incomplete sentence!

-You repeat almost all the serious mistakes!!

-An example could show this point more clearly.

-Technically, you have tried to improve the paragraph. However, as far as language is concerned, you still need to make more effort.

-Good paragraph! Ideas are well organised! The language mistakes are kept to the minimum as well.

-It seems that you developed how beginning university students miss their family life once they start their university studies rather than showing how they face problems

because they lack experience. You should make it clear how lack of experience causes problems.

As various scholars in the area of assessment have discussed (Archer 2000; Angélil-Carter 2000; Knight 1998), feedback plays an important role in process writing when students are given opportunities to re-write after having seen the comments. This was not done in the assignments at NUR because there was no first drafting. The two assignments were totally different. One might wonder if the primary aim of feedback was ever taken into account by the lecturers. It seems that lecturers at NUR played more the role of evaluator than that of the coach as suggested by Kroll (1990). Scaffolding, an important aspect of teaching writing especially in foreign or additional language learning contexts, was not given any importance. This might have had consequences for students' learning of academic literacy.

4.4.3 Role of feedback in redrafting

It seems obvious that the first intention of a lecturer who spends time writing feedback on his/her students' assignment paper is to see them improve when they next submit written work. This has led me to analyse redrafted assignments.

As already noted, students at NUR were not given a chance to write more than one draft for their assignments. They had two different assignments for which they had to produce only one draft to be marked. In the interviews, one of their lecturers said that students complete various tasks but this is not likely to achieve the results that can be achieved from a drafting and redrafting process. She also claimed to have exercises related to the assignments, which they do together in class, but I also wonder if it would not be important to let their students engage with the written feedback to see how they got the information conveyed through the comments.

For some of the assignments at Wits, students submitted second and even third drafts after receiving feedback on earlier drafts. I analysed the successive drafts of the Moyo assignment using the following questions:

- Did students use the feedback to redraft?
- How effectively was the feedback used?

Compared to what was done in the Writing English I module, students in the Foundation module were given opportunities to engage with the feedback they got. This is attested by the instances of redrafting as shown on some of their assignments, where they write the topic and between brackets mention (**second draft**). I was so pleased to see that, and was curious to see how far they had gone with using the feedback to produce the second essay. I expected to notice an improvement in the students' writing, which according to me should influence the increase of marks. The following few questions guided my analysis.

- Did the student use the feedback effectively (was it well understood and used for an improvement)?
- Did the second or third draft show a difference in content?
- Was the mark positively affected by the re drafting?

For this analysis, only the Moyo assignment was used because it was judged to be one of the most scaffolded assignments for which students got opportunities to draft and redraft many times. It was therefore the best essay to use if one wanted to check the effectiveness of feedback in redrafting. A general observation is that most of the students in the three groups of the Foundation module tried to make use of the feedback and following are examples of this use of feedback for three students from each group.

Group A

Wits S A 1

This student seems to be smart in his writing. One of the first drafts he produced pleased the tutor and very few comments were made. He just had to watch his language as it sometimes appeared informal. The final comment on this draft was put as follows:

Wits S A 1,

This is a delightfully forthright essay in which you have expressed some trenchant opinions and revealed some disturbing criticisms of university teaching. In the last paragraph you wander off the topic somewhat and generally your style is too informal for an academic essay. I assume your style becomes more formal in other subjects?

This feedback was useful to the student's redrafting as the next draft was judged very good in these terms, '*a thoughtful and eloquent essay*'. What was a bit surprising is the mark given to this 'delightful' essay, which was 39/50, which is not as delightful as the essay is judged to be.

Wits S A 2

Making good use of feedback is not the strength of every student. This student struggled to use the comments effectively and the same mistakes kept coming in his different drafts. As the assignment was a comparative essay, it is understood that being able to compare and contrast was the main focus. Unfortunately, this student missed the point from the beginning to the end, despite the help of the tutor through her feedback. The following comments are presented to show how the feedback was not used by the student in different drafts. They are presented as they were given to the assignments submitted respectively on: March 15, April 18, and May 4th.

1. *Wits S A 2, you have interesting points to make but:*
 - ✓ *You have not grouped your points into logical categories and sub categories so the points are muddled*
 - ✓ *You need to introduce each category in a separate paragraph*
 - ✓ *You need to introduce each paragraph/category with a generalization or topic sentence*
 - ✓ *You need to make direct comparison even if you are using model1*
 - ✓ *You need to use the language of comparison*

These comments are clear and if we look at what the student did with them, we notice no difference. This is also attested by the feedback given to the next draft.

2. *Wits S A 2, you do not organise the points into relevant sub categories that you can compare and so you make hardly any comparison and your essay turns into a list of unconnected points collected into larger categories. You need to select points that you can compare in all three sources of information.*

This feedback shows that the student did not consider what he was told in the first comments. The last draft he submitted contains the same weaknesses, and the tutor points it out again:

3. *Wits S A 2, this has not improved much from the first draft. You are still not comparing and contrasting i.e. showing similarities and differences between findings from the 3 sources.*

It is not easy to imagine what the tutor could do in this case, but I personally consider this to be a special case of total misinterpretation, where the student needs particular help. I wonder if somewhere between two drafts the student went for a consultation to find out what to do. In case he did not do it, I would suggest that the tutor calls him to provide some individual help because as

Parkerson (1998:118) asserts, one-to-one consultation 'is the only way some students will receive the individual attention they need to make academic progress'.

Wits S A 3

In the same group, taught by the same tutor, students reacted differently to the feedback, but what is encouraging is that a good number managed to use it effectively. This student had problems with language use, especially grammar. Comments received on different drafts helped him and the language of comparison was well used. The following comment shows him where he has to improve:

Wits S A 3, your written English is improving but there are still a number of problems with prepositions, article, sentence structure. This is mostly well categorised and you have used the language of comparison although with some inaccuracies.

This student managed to improve in some areas but the last draft still presented some weaknesses as highlighted by the tutor in these words:

Wits S A 3, This is an improvement but there are still some problems with language, referencing and in one or two places there is still some confusion about the items you compare or contrast-sometimes they still cannot be compared or contrasted. But this is better so your hard work has been rewarded.

There is a reason for this encouraging comment. This student tried to improve, and although the final draft does not reflect big improvement, he has done a lot with the feedback he got. It is a positive thing to know that many of the students use the feedback to improve their work. This is why those who are not able to make sense of the feedback need to be given particular care.

Group B

Wits S B 1

This student's assignment is a model of a good use of feedback. His positive response to the comments from the lecturer enable him to produce an excellent essay. If one looks at the feedback on his first draft and on his last one, the value of feedback can be recognised. The two main comments on the two different drafts are given in these words:

1st draft: *Wits S B 1,*
More careful structuring is needed for your second draft.
-Distinguish between broad categories and sub categories
-Signal each broad category at the beginning of a paragraph
-Synthesise Moyo, Agar and your data more carefully
-Use more direct quotes from all three sources
-Referencing not correct

This is a carefully detailed feedback, apparently easy to interpret, and the student made use of it in such an effective way that his final draft was pleasing as the tutor states,

An amazing improvement! Well done, Wits S B 1.
Organisation = A
Understanding = A
Language = B+

The work was marked 75% which shows how well it was improved as the first one was a fail, 8/20. I checked and realised that all the points mentioned in the feedback were considered one by one. The categories were well distinguished and signalled at the beginning of each paragraph, direct quotes from the three

sources were provided and well referenced. This was a careful use of feedback for redrafting.

Wits S B 3

The use of feedback in redrafting was not as efficient for this student as it was for Wits S B 1. In fact the analysis of his different drafts shows that no clear improvement was achieved. However, a close analysis reveals that this student was not given as clear comment as the other. Some few comments on his drafts are noticed. On one of his drafts, submitted on the 17th of March, apart from a few corrections of misspelled words and bad use of tenses, this student has only one written comment, which says, '*Run-on sentences*'. There is no clear comment on the use of quotations, referencing, structure of such kinds of things. This assignment was marked 17/30, and the mark did not increase in the final draft submitted on May the 5th, which was marked 26/50. The last comment on this final draft was,

Some improvement, but still a way to go, Wits S B 3.

Organisation = C-

Understanding = C-

Language = D

This student appears to need more help. This assignment was drafted more than three times. If in the end this student could not improve his writing, the judgement one can make from the artefact is that the tutor bears part of responsibility. To support this point, one can just think of the role of a Foundation module, which is to give the foundation. If a student who shows that kind of weakness is not given clear feedback, as detailed as possible, it will be unrealistic to expect improvement. It is difficult to understand why there is so much difference in the assistance offered to students.

Also, as Parkerson (2000:127) argues, '[I]n their redrafting, students often

prioritise the aspects of their essay that they feel have received the most attention'. I agree with Parkerson's point and, as there was no apparent focus on any aspect of the student's essay, I reiterate my stand saying that the poor improvement this student made was a shared responsibility with the tutor. I do believe that there should be a priority given to main issues if one needs to help students see clearly which points need more attention.

Another thing that attracted my attention is the attitude of that particular student toward lecturers' help. For him, lecturers are sometime unfair, and once they have made up their minds about a student's weakness, they do not give him equal chances with others. I have to mention that there is no judgement I am trying to make here about this assignment, but this student's comment could not pass without any notice.

Wits S B 6

The case of this student is an illustration of how the feedback can be partly used. Her first draft was judged fluent and generally coherent. And was marked 22/30, which is a good mark. Instead of improving, the next draft was not really an improved version, as she did not do justice to many of the requirements. The feedback she got says:

Wits S B 6,

Your essay is fluent and well written. But you need to be more precise and specific throughout.

-More direct quotes needed

-You did not use Agar at all NB.

-Your respondents' views were not dealt with individually because you generalised your data (The draft was marked 8/20, a fail).

There was a comment about conclusion, which kept coming in all her drafts, and although the last draft was judged improved, this student had a problem with

writing a good conclusion. She did not know how to structure the conclusion as the three comments about the conclusions in the three drafts show:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <i>1st draft</i> | <i>Conclusion needs elaboration and separate paragraph</i> |
| <i>2nd draft</i> | <i>Conclusion too sketchy, does not highlight main points</i> |
| <i>3rd draft</i> | <i>You should highlight key issues in the conclusion</i> |

These comments show clearly how this student did not respond to this particular feedback. The question now is to know which kind of additional help this tutor could give to this student. From experience, I think that there was a slight misunderstanding of the requirements of a good conclusion, and this could possibly be solved by a one on one consultation with the tutor.

Group C

Wits SC 1

Feedback was used by this student as a medical prescription. This simply means that she did everything that was suggested by the tutor. She had comments on grammatical mistakes and some more details to add in some instances. As the lecturer said, there were just surface changes to make and she made them so as to get praises as last comment 'Good work Wits SB 1!' and a 41/50.

Wits S C 2

This student from group C at Wits tried to use the information in the feedback to improve his essay. If we look at the comments on the essays' drafts submitted respectively on March 15, April 19, and May 4th, we notice an improvement if not an answer to questions and suggestions found in the feedback. There is for instance on the first draft a question asking '*what is the topic of this sentence?*' There is also a suggestion put as '*give an example*'. This student has considered the feedback and the last draft shows satisfaction of the lecturer where she says '*nice topic sentence*', and to conclude she writes, '*this is a much better essay*'

than the first one!!' I also observed that the student had provided the example as advised by the lecturer.

The comparison shows also that the quantity of comments and remarks reduces as the student redrafts, which shows that most of the comments are taken into consideration. One of the comments made from the first draft and which apparently was not addressed properly as it keeps coming in all the drafts is about 'structure'. Every feedback given to the student contained this remark, but it was still in the last draft. I think that this should raise the awareness of the tutor of this group so as to provide particular help to this student with structuring the essay. The mark for different drafts did not increase as such. The last essay was marked 27.5/50, whereas the first marked assignment was marked 16/30. These different marks suggest that some of the points raised by the tutor were not well addressed by this student in redrafting.

Wits SC 4

This student apparently did well in this assignment from the beginning although some comments were put to help her improve. She did improve on the draft especially with her paragraphing which was a big problem as mentioned by her tutor saying:

Well organised, but your paragraphs are too long. Break them up to deal more fully with each sub category so you can explain whether there are mismatches between expectations/reality in subcategories.

The final comment on her last draft was written as follows:

Good use of readings, some direct quotes from Wits students could have been incorporated.

I was amazed by the fact that all the other comments were considered apart from this one of incorporating quotes from Wits students, and I went back to check in all her drafts where she did get that feedback. To my surprise, the comment was not given until the last draft. I thought that it could not be the mistake of a student who was not aware of that need, and I would have preferred that such a crucial comment be given as students move on with drafting and redrafting. It was given a bit late for her to consider it for that specific assignment. The mark did not change; it went from 14.5/20 to 37.5/50 in the last draft.

4.5 Analysis of interviews

The analysis of the interviews in this research focuses on lecturers and students' views on the teaching/learning of writing, and its assessment. It is presented in two parallel parts based on the two different universities involved in the study. Based on questions asked to respondents and their responses, which generated the sub categories used in the analysis, views of lecturers are presented first, and those of students follow. This section presents the analysis of lecturers and students' views on academic writing, their beliefs about factors influencing good writing, their respective roles in academic writing, and what they think about feedback in assessment. It also shows their suggestions for a sound assessment.

4.5.1 Lecturers and students' views on academic writing

In order to make a good assessment of academic writing, I believe that it is important for both lecturers and students to know what is academic writing and its requirements. One of the interests of the research was to understand what lecturers and students found different at University compared to writing at school and the differences in assessment practices.

Responses from both lecturers and students revealed that they were aware of

the demands of writing at University. They knew that at university, as it could be expected, things were harder because of being much demanding compared to school. Their views are presented in the following sub section.

4.5.1.1 Lecturers and students' views at Wits

In order to solve a problem, one has to know how to locate or determine it. Lecturers at both universities seem to know what are the problems their students are more likely to meet. Students too are aware of the changes their writing has to go through if they want to grow into good writers.

4.5.1.1.1 Lecturers' views

Lecturers at Wits were aware of the problems their students might encounter due to not being used to the university writing style. They could therefore predict some problems, and most of all they were prepared to understand their struggle and help them. This awareness is illustrated by their answers to my question about whether they think their students' writing was influenced negatively or positively by the new academic environment. Some of their answers are put in these words:

Wits L A: *I think ehm, students who come from school find that the demands of them for the kind of writing they have to do are much higher and/ or difficult for them to cope with than the kinds of writings they did at school.*

She went on saying that:

I think the context is difficult for them from that point of view as well as for the fact that most of the courses other than the Foundation courses do not build in specific focus on the training in writing as such.

This view is shared by her colleague teaching the group B (Wits L B) as she asserts:

They actually struggle quite a lot. Ehm mainly because they haven't encountered academic writing at school... and the school emphasis is not being on the kind of writing, the kind of discourse that's expected at university. I think that even students who are not so called disadvantaged or under prepared haven't had adequate training in the kind of writing that is expected at University. They don't understand reference practices, they don't know how to construct essays, they don't know how to synthesise, work from different readings, that kind of writing. They are definitely unprepared even in the best schools.

The tutor of the third group (Wits L C) qualified the change students go through in their university first year as a jump. She says that *'In the first term some are like overwhelmed by the big jump between what they expected and what they actually got'*.

This awareness of students' lack of preparedness is a positive thing because it influences lecturers' attitudes and practices. They feel obliged to help these students overcome the problems they meet. One of the best ways that Wits lecturers seem to have applied to help their students is the scaffolding technique as Wits L B states it:

Because it's a Foundation course, we try to understand precisely what goes into the writing of academic essays. Ehm, and so, we scaffold the course very very explicitly around the three themes in that first module.

Their course is indeed carefully scaffolded and its assessment as well. One aspect of scaffolded assessment that helped students at Wits is the opportunity they were given to produce more than one draft, which was assessed and given back for them to rewrite considering the feedback. This is part of what they believe could help their students become good writers, and I totally agree with them on that point. There is evidence of the value of both feedback and redrafting in the examples quoted in the previous sections.

These lecturers also believe that what helps their students to become good writers, that is, able to write in an academic way, is the exercises they have about writing the two kinds of essays: argumentative essay and comparative essay, which, according to one of the lecturers *'are the two sorts of strategies that underline a lot of academic writing'*.

Assessment for them is part of the course design, and they believe that the whole course is structured toward assessment of writing. Students work at different tasks that are assessed, which all contribute toward the final task that they present. Students are accompanied all along their writing, which is the main focus of process writing.

4.5.1.1.2 *Students' views*

Students are the first directly touched by that change of writing style. Coming to university for many of them meant to change many things, among them writing practices. As they claim in the focus group interview, there are so many things that change about writing when they come to the university. Major changes that they noticed concern the style of writing, but also the kind of help they get. Those changes are expressed in these words:

Wits SC1: *I think the difference between writing at school and university is that ehm, at school there is a guideline. You are guided into what you are supposed to write and you don't have to be complex in your writing. But at University, there is no spoon-feeding. You have to think for yourself, do your own research, and make sense of all the readings you've made.*

The idea this student was trying to express was later contradicted when they talked about the help provided by their lecturers. In fact, some of them asserted that their tutors were there to help them at every step of their writing, even in

other courses as the same student puts it:

Wits SC1: *Ehm I don't think there is something that needs to be done with AEELS. Maybe if you talk about other courses, because with AEELS ahhh, those lecturers are there for us. They are there for us for anything. Not only for AEELS course. Even if you have problems in writing in other Law courses, for me for example, I can go to Wits LC to get help.*

Other students are also aware of the changes of writing style that the university imposes on them, and they assert that unlike school writing, academic writing is more demanding and has rules. They talk about references, illustrations, and many other aspects of academic texts that they have to follow in writing their essay.

Wits SB1 says: *I think the main difference is that, ehm, here at university, you write ehm, in an academic style. It means that everything that you put down, everything that you write down, you gonna have to reference it so that you avoid plagiarism...while in high school we're just writing for the sake of writing and using somebody's idea without referencing it.*

They therefore acknowledge the importance of the Foundation module in making them able to write in an acceptable academic way.

Wits SC5 says: *I think it was important because it kind of giving me guidelines on how to go about conducting a research, how to write my academic writing referencing, something that we are not taught, and it improves your marks because you kind of use what we have seen in other modules.*

Another student in Group B (Wits SB6) takes the point further saying:

The course is very important because it touches on all of our subjects, which is why I support it. Like for example any of some of us who are doing social work, we have academic writing that we have to do and in social work we don't learn how to do academic writing, but English teaches you how to go about your academic writing, and if we didn't do English we wouldn't be able to do as well as we do in other courses.

Although these students are aware of the demands of the academic writing, they know that it is worth taking the module because of the help it provides even for other courses. This is a good reason for motivation, a positive factor in the learning process.

4.5.1.2 Lecturers and students' views at NUR

Lecturers and students expressed their views in relation to what they thought were the differences in writing at University and writing at school

4.5.1.2.1 Lecturers' views

NUR lecturers are also aware that their students come to the university with a low level of writing. This influences their teaching because they judge it necessary to start with some theory to help their students be at the level of producing acceptable English. The two lecturers explained how theory for these first year students was important as they believe that academic writing has rules that they have to familiarise themselves with before engaging with writing longer texts like essays and others.

They assert putting more emphasis on academic writing as they know it is a quite different style from the writing students are used to at high school, and it is the kind of writing their students will be required to produce all along their university studies. One of the lecturers (NUR LB) said,

I think the kind of writing they were producing in secondary school is different from what they are producing now, what they produce at university level. Because university studies are demanding and most of the time they get essay type questions and they have to develop their writing skills in order to respond like university students anyway.

4.5.1.2.2 Students' views

Students at NUR affirm that they experienced a big change in their writing at university compared to school writing. They express what they judged as independence in writing, where their ideas are expressed without much guidance from their lecturers. This is clearly expressed by NURSA1:

The difference is that most of the assignments or works done at University are done outside the class. We have to write on our own, we have various tasks and most of the time you, ehm we really express what we feel. But in secondary school, you are much guided by the teacher.

His colleagues were more impressed by the quality of teaching because they had under qualified teachers at school, and having well qualified lecturers was a positive thing. Most students recognised the challenges of writing at university. They say that academic writing is too demanding as they put it:

NUR SA4: *There is a difference because at school the writing is not too demanding. You just have to write. But here, we have to follow many requirements, as the lecturer wants it like coherence, well-organised writing, and so on.*

Another says:

The difference is that at University things are more complicated. You need to be careful in your writing and follow so many rules, whereas at school we were free to write, just checking if what you write has a meaning.
(NUR SB1)

The students mentioned other differences like writing pace, referencing, which implies looking for books in the library, which was not an easy task for them as beginners. All these requirements and demands of academic writing had to be faced by both lecturers and students. The lecturers have different ways of responding to different situations they are in, and the first thing is teaching accordingly, and teaching implies assessment. They expressed what they think in their teaching or assessment could help their students to improve their academic writing as it is presented in the following section.

4.5.2 Role of lecturers and students in academic writing courses

As the teaching-learning process involves both teachers/lecturers and students, it is obvious that tutors and their students have a role to play in the academic writing module. This is shown in the interviews with lecturers as they suggest that students should play their role in order to achieve successful outcomes. Students on their side give a whole list of thing their lecturers should do if they want them to develop their academic writing. Their wishes or suggestions can be grouped into two main categories being:

- Lecturers and students' role in learning/assessing academic writing.
- Feedback and feedback use

Under each category sub-categories include:

- Lecturers' responses to their students' needs
- Lecturer-student relationship
- Planning and practicing assessment
- What is given importance in assessing writing or giving feedback
- Feedback communication to students, etc. (oral versus

written feedback, class versus one-on-one consultation)

- The role of feedback in redrafting
- Appreciation of feedback (The kind of feedback given and what is preferred)

4.5.2.1 Lecturers and students' role in academic writing

It is an important thing that both lecturers and students know their role in the teaching and learning of academic writing. As the primary aim of every tutor is to see his/her students gain knowledge, they are expected to provide them with as much help as they can. Students are also required to take every learning opportunity given to them to improve their knowledge. As students mentioned different problems they encounter in their writing at university, I also wanted to know what kind of help they get from their lecturers in order to face those problems.

4.5.2.1.1 *Lecturers' responses to students' problem*

Lecturers at Wits responded to most of their students' needs in relation to academic writing, giving them required input into how to write, mainly focusing on the two main kinds of essays: argumentative and comparative essays. There were also academic writing workshops organised throughout the year that helped the few students who attended them. The best help the students got was the scaffolding of tasks and the chance to submit drafts before the final drafts, which was not done for students at NUR. Students also got formative assessment (through different tasks they were given) preparing them to the final task that they presented as a summative assessment.

Most of the students recognise that their tutors help them to develop their academic writing. At Wits, students make a clear difference between the assessment practices in different modules they take. They appreciate the kind of

help they get from AELS lecturers, who are teaching on the Foundation module. Comparing to other courses, they say that AELS lecturers are always there to help them. One of them says:

Wits SC6:

I think my problem is in Law. In Law they are not giving us even the assessment criteria or what they want. They need to improve on that. But in AELS everything is okay.

At NUR, students recognise that they get some help from their lecturers, as some of them express it:

NUR SA4: *Yes, our lecturers helped us. For example we were taught how to find books in the library. Also they showed us how to get what you need in a book using techniques of reading. They taught us how to quote, how to organise our ideas...*

However, as the discussion moves on, their enthusiasm about their lecturers' help disappears and they contradict themselves, showing that the assessment practices do not help them at all. They say that they are not given enough assessment, and sometimes do not even get their copies back to see what they did incorrectly.

NUR SA1: *The problem with feedback is that sometimes we don't even get it. For instance there are lecturers who don't show us our copies and just send us marks.*

The comment from this student can make one wonder why give feedback on students' works and prevent them from seeing it. It might be possible that the copies did not have any written feedback. By failing to give feedback to students,

NUR lectures ignore the advice given by Race in Knight (1998) about changing assessment to help people to benefit from feedback. Some of his points suggest that assessors should:

- Reduce the time interval before feedback is given
- Consult more with students
- Make feedback immediate
- Give marked final papers back to students, etc. (1998:73).

When asked about assessment criteria, they all said that it was not one of their lecturers' priorities. They said that they have never been given criteria, and that everything they wrote was marked out of no criteria as one of the students conveys it:

NUR SA1: *They mark as they like*

This is a sad conclusion from these students. They know that things should be done differently, and yet, they feel there is nothing to do about it and just accept it. This, I believe has a negative influence on their learning, and I support the point that discourages this practice as given by Farmer and Eastcott (1995:88-9) arguing that: '[H]aving a clear understanding, as a learner, of where one is going and what one is expected to be able to do affects students' desire to learn'. Another student complained about the lack of encouragement in lecturers' comments, as they appear too negative. He says:

NUR SA3: *There are lecturers who always give us negative feedback. They tell us you have poor grammar, poor way of writing. Everything they make it negative.*

When asked if their lecturers suggest a way of correcting those weaknesses, he Said,

No, they don't. They can't.

This answer was for me a proof that there was no collaboration, or good relation between students and lecturers in the Writing English I module at NUR. What amazed me again is that even lecturers know that the assessment criteria are crucial in the assessment process, but just neglect them. To my great surprise, the worry expressed by students about lack of clear assessment criteria in all the assignments was confirmed by one of the lecturers who asserts that students never get to know what they will be assessed on although they know it is a good practice to favour. He argues,

NUR LA: *One thing that can be done which can help a lot is to let students know what they will be assessed on, the criteria of assessment. It is not; it has never been done at this University, in this department.*

His colleague asserted that she always gives assessment criteria, but the claim was not confirmed by both the artefacts (assignment and exam tasks) and the responses from her students who said that they never get assessment criteria. This made me think that she was aware of the need to give assessment criteria, although she never gave them.

4.5.2.1.2 *Lecturer-student relationship*

This point was judged important because I believe that the kind of relationship between the lecturer and the student influences in a way the teaching-learning process, and assessment as part of the process. All the lecturers from the two universities affirmed that they were open to receiving their students for discussion. Students also mentioned that they were given consultation time to see their lecturers for clarification if needed.

However, I found it difficult to understand why very few students at Wits, and not

even a single student at NUR went for consultation. There was definitely another reality behind the conception of consultation time. Some responses from the interviews revealed that there must be a misinterpretation of the use of that time with students focusing on challenging marks awarded rather than on clarification of assignment tasks or writing difficulties as some lecturers say:

Wits LB: *Most of the time they come for marks. It is quite unusual to see a student whose consultation is not for mark, yeah.*

At NUR, the consultation time seemed to be a quite unfamiliar practice. As NUR LA says, students are not willing to see lecturers in their offices. There is actually no clear communication between them. It seems that the unequal power relations between students and lecturers discourage students from seeing lecturers in their offices. This is confirmed by NUR LA in the interview, as he complains about students' lack of interest in consultation:

NUR LA: *I have been teaching here for more than six years now. I have always made the same remarks, but to tell you the truth, no student has turned up to my office maybe to ask me to comment on anything that maybe they would not have understood in the classroom in front of the peers.*

This is an alarming situation, and measures need to be taken so as to motivate students to consult. As consultation time is in the interest of the student, it is difficult to understand why they ignore it at that point without any specific reason. At NUR, students confirmed this point made by LA, as no one of them claimed to have gone for consultation. There appear to be a big gap between students and lecturers, and students are unable to bridge it so as to talk to lecturers freely.

At Wits, students appeared to be closer to their tutors and although it was not done by everyone, some students knew the importance of consultation and did it. Reasons would vary from clarification to mark seeking, with a high percentage

allocated to mark claim as they express it in these words:

Wits SA1: *well it depends on what mark I got. Well, if I got less than 70, well, I'll definitely go to my tutor and ask my tutor why did you have to give me less than a 70?*

4.5.2.1.3 Planning and practising assessment

Assessment being part of the teaching and learning process should be well planned, especially for a writing course, which is not easy to assess. In their interviews, lecturers recognised the important role of assessment in the teaching of academic writing. At Wits, they show the importance given to assessment in the Foundation module. The whole course is well scaffolded, and assessment is taken as an integral part of the course as one of the lecturers at Wits clarifies:

Wits L C: *The Foundation course is, the whole course is structured towards assessment of writing.*

To the question about when in the course of their teaching they start thinking about assessing their students' writing, another lecturer said:

Wits LB: *Oh, that's part of the planning of the whole course.*

These responses from Wits lecturers show how assessment was pre-planned and thought of very carefully.

At NUR, the two lecturers mentioned that they assess students' writing in the middle of the course and at the end. They decide on the assessment as they run the course and this must have an influence on the kind of assessment they end up giving. Thinking about their responses, I made a link to what their students

said about not having enough assessment, or not having time to redraft. Lecturers also said that sometimes they do not finish marking their students' copies and I think this has to do with lack of organisation.

NUR LB says:

But then sometimes, I think we might plan to correct their tasks and give constructive feedback and later on you find that you really didn't manage to get time to finish the corrections in time, which means in that case they might not be able to benefit from your feedback, from your comments.

There is evidence that in cases where students could not see their assignment copies, they might have stayed unmarked or been marked in a hurry and just kept in the lecturer's office. If that is the case, one can wonder what is the role of assessment in the learning process.

About achieving the assessment plans, all the lecturers said that sometimes it does not happen as they have planned. The most important reason they all gave was lack of time, although Wits lecturers recognised that they have the advantage of having the course well structured with all its major assignments planned before.

Teaching load was a problem to NUR lecturers' achievement of their assessment plans as LA says:

You may think of good thing to be done, but there is also this thing of teaching load. Heavy teaching load means plenty of things to do in such a way that when you go through copies to mark, you really don't think of making these serious remarks.

Lack of focus in marking was also pointed out by NUR SA3 who judged

unconstructive the feedback he got from his lecture. He argues:

I think if lecturers could read deeply, they could help us, and write very important comments or feedback.

Interviews with both students and lecturers revealed that the most used way of assessment was lecturer-assessing students. One lecturer at NUR (NUR L B) claimed using peer assessment in her assessment although the claim was not confirmed by interviews with students.

NUR LB: I don't assess them myself all the time. Because sometimes I also involve them. Like when I give them some tasks, let's say to produce a two-page essay or write two paragraphs, I ask them to exchange their papers, and each one has to be assessed by his/her peer. They give comments to each other. That's what I can call peer assessment.

It is, actually difficult to imagine how peer assessment can be used effectively when even the lecture-to-student assessment is problematic. At Wits, Wits L B said that peer assessment was more likely to be used for class oral presentation and not for written tasks. It is important to recognise that peer assessment needs careful planning to encourage students to help each other and therefore be effective.

4.5.2.1.4 What is given importance in assessing and giving feedback

Feedback is a complex but integral part of teaching writing. When giving feedback, assessors choose what they judge appropriate, that is, what they think can work best to improve their students' writing. As Falchikov (1995:157) argues, 'It is widely recognized that learning depends on feedback to the learner and that providing quick and helpful feedback to students is beneficial'. I do agree with Falchikov that students learn from the feedback they get from their lecturers.

Also, it has been observed that students give more importance to what is stressed in the feedback they get. Lecturers need to be careful in giving feedback so as to help their students learn what is expected of them. Another reality of assessment and feedback is that put forward by Sutton (1991:9) that 'What You Test Is What You Get'. Students react to what is given priority in the tasks set, and most importantly what is emphasised in assessment criteria.

There are aspects of writing that were given priority by lecturers, and this is shown by the kind of tasks they set and feedback they gave (as seen in the analysis of artefacts). At Wits an important aspect of academic writing that was stressed through written feedback is referencing. All the lecturers gave that feedback and explained clearly why it was important to provide references. This is an interesting strategy to face the issue of plagiarism in students' writing. Unfortunately, this aspect of academic writing was not given the importance it deserves by NUR lecturers.

The analysis of interviews revealed that the emphasis in the academic writing course was on essay-type tasks at Wits. What was given importance in assessing students' writing is more the content as expressed by one of the lecturers:

Wits LA: *It's content because you know, what I've found with students is that students actually see essays as a chance to express what they want to say, their ideas. So, if you don't engage with those ideas, students are disappointed.*

This is an important point raised by the lecturer, and an analysis of the kind of feedback she gave revealed that engagement with students' writing. She was responding not only to the writing, but also to questions that students put through their writing. However, the form was also considered although not at the same

level as content. This is confirmed by the argument put forward by WitsLC, saying:

I think you can't actually separate the content from the form of writing. So, obviously what one is assessing is students' understanding of the course content. And very often the clarity of their writing is one way of judging how well they have understood the content.

This argument shows the importance given to form, and another point made by LA shows the real place one has to give to language in relation to content in academic writing.

Wits LA: *I think the quality of language, the accuracy of the language ehm, is an aspect, but I don't think it's the prime focus of assessment at all in students' writing.*

In agreeing with this lecturer, I would argue that the focus on the quality of language sometimes overtakes the attention we give to content, and we tend to forget that the main focus should be on content. This was noticed on some of students' copies at NUR, where no comment on content was made. Lecturers focused on language mistakes, most of them being spelling mistakes. It is really unfortunate that students in the Writing English I module did not get any response to ideas they were conveying. I suspect that it is the reason why they qualified the feedback as not deep.

It is worth mentioning, however that lecturers at NUR support the idea that content should be given priority over form in assessing writing, although what they did was different. One of them put it clearly in these words:

NUR LA: *You see English is for all of us an additional language. We are first Kinyarwanda speakers. So, I don't really punish them for these minor*

language mistakes like articles use, the use of tenses, but what I value most is the ability to express an idea. So, I look at the content, how they are able to express an idea, ...I go for language when the mistakes are really blatant.

What is true is that lecturers at NUR seem to be aware of good practices, and one could wonder why they do not implement them. Their students' copies do not show much focus on content. It is, instead language that is foregrounded.

4.5.2.1.5 *Feedback communication to students*

Giving feedback to students is a crucial aspect of assessment. The lecturer needs to make sure the feedback makes sense to students and contributes to their learning. Also, as feedback is constructed for students, it is the responsibility of the lecturer to communicate it to students in an effective way. In support of the findings of Diab (2006) this research found that students' preferences vary. Some prefer feedback to be written on the papers, some prefer it to be discussed in class, and only a few prefer to discuss it individually in a one on one consultation. Students and lecturers expressed their views on what they think is the best way of giving feedback.

For most of the interviewees, the least favoured method of communicating is one on one consultation, which, for lecturers is time consuming, and for many students too 'threatening'. The following are some of their comments:

When asked which method worked for them NUR students expressed a preference for whole class feedback:

NUR SA4: *I prefer to have feedback on the board because on the board we make discussions and everybody gets something about what is written.*

NUR SA6: *I think everyone has to be aware of what should be done and what they are working on. That is why it is always good to write on the board.*

NUR SB3: *I also think that writing on the board is helpful because there may be some feedback, which might be helpful for students who didn't get them on the paper.*

While these students make an important point about the potential for learning from each other's mistakes, lecturers face the challenge of involving all students in the discussion of errors which some of them have not made.

Another important point raised by one of the students is the lack of motivation and encouragement from lecturers. Students at NUR would like their lecturers to be more encouraging:

NUR S A2: *Something I would like to ask, a wish, is that the lecturer should encourage us not only to say that you have misrepresented or they can give you a given mark and encourage you to go ahead, that's all.*

At Wits, students had quite different views about how feedback is communicated to them and which method is better for giving feedback:

Wits SB1: *Well, sometimes they do recommend that we can go and see them so that they explain more what they mean, or they sometimes, they can write straight in the paper that this is what you should do to improve your assignment. That's the way they do it. So, but they vary, but they do write a lot rather than consultation.*

Students from group C appreciated how their lecturer gave varied types of feedback depending on the needs:

Wits SC3: *...sometimes she writes on a paper, sometimes it's a one on one where she tells you improve on this; you need to improve a little more on that, yeah. Sometimes you get it written down.*

Wits S C2: *I think the one in class is kind of better because like even for those who are quite scared, I mean not scared but like quite shy to ask like probably they gonna get something like she says in class you know. I mean, then I prefer the one in class than the one on one consultation.*

Some students said that they preferred both written comments on their papers, and feedback given in class. One of them, Wits S C6 says:

I think both. But the problem is when they do oral, they gen, they speak to the class because they don't wanna pick on you, ehm but the assessment where they write next to your assignment, you can physically see what's really wrong. But then when they do it orally you can't really see where the mistakes are and, some of our lecturers tend to have discussions with the whole class instead of having individual discussions because they don't always have time to sit one on one with us.

It is true that it is difficult for lecturers to find time to sit with all students individually. One suggestion is for lecturers to focus on the students who seem unable to respond appropriately to written feedback (see page 88).

4.5.2.1.6 *Appreciation of feedback and its role in redrafting*

Once they have received feedback, students have the responsibility to react to it. Boud argues that '[E]very act of assessment gives a message to students about what they should be learning and how they should go about it' (1998:37). Before taking any action on the feedback, students have first to recognise its importance. In the focus group interviews, students expressed what they thought

about the kind of feedback they receive and how they make use of it. Students at Wits were appreciative of the feedback they received and explained how it helped them improve their academic writing. For example:

Wits S C1: *I think assessment helps in improving our academic literacy. For example, for one of our essays, the one we were comparing Moyo and Agar's writings, after she marked, she was mainly centred on our referencing, and we had tutorials on it. On how to reference, how to be more clear that when you quote a certain author, you just don't leave the quote hanging there. You quote and then explain what you understand.*

This observation suggests that the student was conscious of the help she received from the feedback, and was ready to apply it to her writing. When asked if they consider the feedback in their redrafting, the Wits students said that they all do, and for all their subjects. They mentioned however, that some comments are not clear enough for them to interpret. In that case, some of them went to their tutors to ask for further clarification as one of them explained when asked if they always understand the meaning of the feedback:

Wits S B 6: *Not always. Sometimes you have to go back to the tutors and ask them "why did you say this?»*

This again raises the one on one consultation issue. In cases where students are unable or unwilling to participate in such consultation, unclear comments will not help them to improve their writing.

Failure to understand the feedback is one reason why some students fail to use it effectively. Lack of experience in working with feedback on content and organisation may be one reason why some students attend more to surface errors. Wits LA expresses concern about this focus on surface errors:

Wits L A: *I think there is another issue which is, some of the students seem to think*

that once you've written an essay, the kind of feedback you get should only be about correcting the grammar and the language and that's what they do. You know, sometimes I get the same essay, except with the grammar corrected or with the spelling corrected. So, they haven't realised that you may need to restructure completely or you may put an extra information, and I don't know whether that's because they don't understand the function of a draft and redrafting or whether they are just bored.

This lecturer's comment suggests that students may be uncertain about how to use feedback. It also suggests, as discussed earlier, that if the student perceives the lecturer's feedback as focusing more on form than content, it is form that will be the focus of any redrafting that is done

Wits LB, emphasised the role of students in the feedback process. She argued that students have to own the feedback and to feel that they have to do something about it instead of leaving everything to the lecturer:

I do think that students have got to be active that's the point in the feedback process. They have to own it; they can't just look at it personally.

She also argues:

Unless the students themselves actually take off. And it's more that taking off than giving feedback that is important. So, it's what students do, not what the teacher does.

For this to happen the students need to understand the feedback and if they do not, to take action by contacting their lecturer.

It is difficult to discuss the role of feedback in redrafting in the Writing English I module at NUR for two main reasons. Firstly, students did not have an opportunity to write one essay more than once. Secondly, they complained about

lack of constructive feedback, and went so far as to say that sometimes they did not get any feedback.

However, when asked if they considered any feedback received when writing their next assignment, many said they did. NUR SA2's comment is representative of the responses of most students:

NUR S A 2: *Yes of course, if you have got under ten out of twenty, meaning you fail, you will never forget that mistake you made.*

When asked if feedback is considered just for marks, he responded:

The feedback is a new information. Something you didn't know before. And the marks is for something else, we have to succeed. Personally, I consider both. I consider feedback so that I can get more marks next time.

It was not easy to evaluate this claim given the lack of redrafting and the different genres of successive assignment tasks. In the view of the NUR lecturers students were not responsive to written feedback:

NUR L A says: *The students don't care for the remarks, if you want you can write them or leave it. Even the poorest ones, they will not dare to come to you and ask if you can expand on what was not understood in the classroom. They don't care.*

Responses from lecturers and students at both institutions revealed points of both agreement and disagreement about forms of feedback and 'take-up' of any feedback that was given.

CHAPTER FIVE. GENERAL CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 General Conclusion

This research aimed to investigate assessment practices in regard to the teaching of academic writing in two first year English language modules, 'Foundation in English Language' at the University of the Witwatersrand and 'Writing English I' at the National University of Rwanda. It aimed to understand the role and nature of assessment in academic literacy modules offered in two very different teaching and learning contexts.

The literature reviewed provided a framework for understanding of the kind of academic writing expected at tertiary level, and for understanding the role of assessment in teaching and learning. Analysis of data from assignments, examination papers and interviews revealed some similarities but many differences in both attitudes and practices in the two institutions.

One of the key differences is that in the Writing English I module at NUR, assessment is considered separate from the teaching and learning process, whereas at Wits it is considered an integral part of the process. Assessment in the Foundation module at Wits was part of the planning of the course, and the whole course was carefully scaffolded around the assessment of writing. At NUR, the few assignments had no clear assessment criteria, and scaffolding seemed not to be the primary concern. For instance, students were not given opportunities to work on different drafts and react to the feedback they received. It is hard to imagine that at the end of the Writing English I module students would be able to write in an acceptable academic style, particularly as the assignments did not introduce students to such key aspects of academic writing as quoting and referencing. There was no clear improvement in students' writing

as shown by the analysis of artefacts.

In both institutions lecturers claimed that they gave constructive feedback, and in some instance blamed some of their students for not always using it in their redrafting, even where there was evidence of very little feedback having been given (as was the case on some of the assignments at NUR).

Analysis of the feedback given to students indicated variation in what was foregrounded by individual lecturers at each institution. In general, the lecturers at Wits paid more attention to content and organisation than to surface errors while at NUR the reverse was the case. There was a perception on the part of the majority of the Wits' students that lecturers were appreciative of what they were trying to achieve, while some NUR students complained about the lack of encouragement from their lecturers in the feedback they received.

Another difference between Wits and NUR was students' involvement in reflection on their learning at Wits, but not at NUR. At Wits the practice of completing assignment forms in which students reflected on the planning and execution of their work initiated a dialogue in print between student and lecturer which contributed to learning. It also enabled lecturers to focus their feedback on concerns expressed by the students.

From the interviews with lecturers it emerged that those at Wits are able to work as a team whereas institutional constraints had made this difficult for the NUR lecturers who expressed regret that they had not worked collaboratively.

One similarity across the institutions is students' reluctance to participate in individual consultations with lecturers. When a minority of students did consult a lecturer the purpose most frequently expressed was to challenge the mark awarded to an assignment.

Apart from scaffolding tasks and giving constructive feedback, an important assessment practice noticed in the Foundation module at Wits is the use of assignment planning forms and feedback handouts. This practice helps students express their points of view about the assignment, and the response the lecturer gives to their reflection establishes a kind of print conversation very important in the learning process. This could be effective especially in big classes, where the lecturer would go straight to responding to students' assumptions and questions about the assignment as they appear on the completed forms. It also helps to respond directly to crucial points as individual students raise them.

The focus of the recommendations in the final paragraphs is on practices at the two institutions in which the study was located. However, some of these recommendations may be of interest to lecturers and students in other contexts.

5.2 Recommendations

Although students have an important role to play in the assessment process, lecturers have the primary responsibility for its planning and implementation. The following recommendations are addressed separately to lecturers at each institution.

5.2.1 To lecturers in the Foundation module (Wits)

Analysis of data from the University of the Witwatersrand has identified a range of excellent practices in support of student proficiency in academic writing. However, a few recommendations for further improvement are offered in the points below:

- Lecturers could consider ways of making the valuable one on one consultation process appear less threatening for students. For example, two lecturers could role-play such a consultation session to a class in

order to demonstrate the role of individual consultation in learning.

- When there is evidence that a student has failed to understand the written feedback given, the lecturer concerned should arrange a consultation with the student in order to explore the nature of the student's lack of comprehension and to offer further assistance.
- If a lecturer refers a student to the university's Writing Centre s/he should monitor the student's progress there.
- In the interest of fairness to all students, each one should receive the detailed feedback that s/he requires (rather than some receiving feedback that is qualitatively more helpful than others).

5.2.2 To lecturers in the Writing English I module (NUR)

It is recognised that the lecturers at NUR work in a context in which resource limitations affect what is achievable. However, some changes to current practices could be effected without the use of substantial additional resources of either materials or time:

Lecturers should integrate planning for assessment into their course planning, giving particular attention to the scaffolding of assignments. This would be facilitated by working together on such planning.

- They should bring the assignments and the examination paper into alignment so that the summative assessment is an assessment of what students have learned from their work throughout the module.
- They should set assessment criteria for each task in order to help students understand what is expected from them and to promote equity in the marking process.
- They could introduce assignment-planning forms in order to assist students to reflect on their learning.

Increasing the number of assignments given to students, providing detailed and encouraging written feedback to students on successive drafts of their writing and making time available for individual consultations all have implications for lecturers' workloads. These implications need to be considered by the institution in the interests of its students.

5.2.3 To students at both institutions

Students need to be active in the learning process. Their lecturers may be more likely to offer detailed feedback if they see evidence of student engagement with this feedback. Students should be pro-active in requesting assistance from their lecturers where this is required.

Finally, the orientation of both lecturers and students in regard to assessment should be one of assessment for learning.

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APPENDICES