Chapter 20: Writing research reports

Task 1

Read Text 1, and answer the following questions:

1 Identify the introduction to the report.
- Which sentence(s) identify the general background to the report?
- Which sentence(s) indicate why the research is important?
- Which sentence(s) indicate a gap in our knowledge?
- Which sentence(s) present the research questions?
- How many research questions are there?
- Whose voice is dominant in each stage of the introduction?

2 Identify the literature review.
- What types of voices are used in the literature review?

3 Identify the methods section in the report.
- In your own words, describe the methods used.
- Is the methods section descriptive or analytical?
  - How do you know?
- Whose voice dominates the section?
- Look at the verbs used to describe the method.
  - What is the most common tense?
  - Are most of the verbs active or passive? Why?

4 Identify the results section.
- Summarise the main findings of the study in your own words.
- How are the results analysed?
- How many voices do you hear in the results section?

5 Identify the discussion section.
- Summarise the writer's conclusions in your own words.
- Which of the following does the section do:
  - Identify the findings?
  - Compare the findings with the findings of others?
  - Discuss the significance of the findings?

Text 1

[1]Over the past decade or so, academic literacy (AL) support efforts have expanded across many English-speaking universities. [2]Recently academics at Herwon State University have indicated that they are increasingly concerned that many students are entering university with little knowledge of key university-level AL skills. [3]These skills include how to express ideas using appropriate academic language, how to read academic material strategically and how to think critically. [4]This is a concern, as unless students who lack these skills are identified quickly and provided with AL support, their grades and progress though university are likely to suffer. [5]Identifying which students need support is a multi-faceted investigation and can include measures of student awareness of AL and its centrality to success at university. [6]In addition, post-entry testing of student skill levels as well as student self-reported attitudes toward AL should also be considered. [7]This report examines student self-reported attitudes toward and awareness of AL as well as its perceived value as the students enter university.

[8]The relationship between AL and student success at university is complex and has become increasingly so in recent years. [9]According to Wingate (2006) increasing student enrolments have also seen an increase in student diversity over the past 10 years. [10]This has led to challenges in student retention and progression (Herke & Wong, 2016; Brick, Herke, Wilson & Wong, 2017) and it is likely that academic writing support has increased as a means of meeting this challenge. [11]Of further concern, Peters and Herke (2015), in their research on the wellbeing of university students, have shown a strong link between poor AL competence and high anxiety levels, particularly around assessment due dates. [12]The identification of this link has also had a direct impact on the provision of AL support resources. [13]Herke and Wong (2016) have shown that enhancing AL levels in students leads to increased academic success. [14]Similarly, James and Hoadley (2014) found that the inclusion of AL modules as a compulsory component of undergraduate programs increased successful completions as well as employment outcomes.

[15]However, despite the success associated with increased AL support in universities, many students are still not aware of what support is available to them and continue to struggle with the nuances of academic communication (Morty & Daisy, 2017). [15]This lack of awareness has long term effects, with research showing that poor academic outcomes are linked to long-term employability issues (Herke & Wong, 2016). [16]Given the importance AL awareness and support, the following report describes the results of an investigation into the attitudes towards AL skills and the provision of AL support services in a large cohort of undergraduate students. [17]The research made use of a questionnaire that sought to establish first if students though knowledge of Academic Literacy was important for academic success. [18]This was further developed by assessing students' evaluations of their own AL skill levels. [19]Finally, the questionnaire asked whether students were aware of the range of Academic Literacy support modules available to them. [20]The findings of this research are presented below,

followed by a discussion of these results.

[21]This research was conducted using a Qualtrix online questionnaire designed to elicit students' attitudes and understandings of aspects of AL at university as well as their awareness of university provided AL resources. [22]The sample consisted of 854 first year students who were asked to complete the questionnaire in the first tutorial of semester. [23]To avoid participant coercion, ethics approval was applied for and granted, and the questionnaire was administered by a non-teaching researcher. [24]The questionnaire results were coded and analysed using NVivo.

[25]The questionnaires remained open for one week so that any participating student could return to the questions if they wished to expand on or change their responses once they left the tutorial. [26]The questionnaire was voluntary and all participants were provided with opt-out details should they wish to withdraw from the investigation at a later date.

[27]Overall, students indicated that they were aware of the importance of developing their academic literacy (AL) skills. [28]As Figure 1 shows, a majority of students (90%) either agreed, or strongly agreed with the notion that developing AL was pivotal to their success at university. [29]This indicated that students are aware of, and place a high value on, knowledge of academic language as a means conveying ideas in university assignments. [30]However, a small percentage of participants (10%) did not place a high value on knowledge of academic language, either because they considered academic language to be overly complicated, or because they were unsure of the specific nature of academic language.
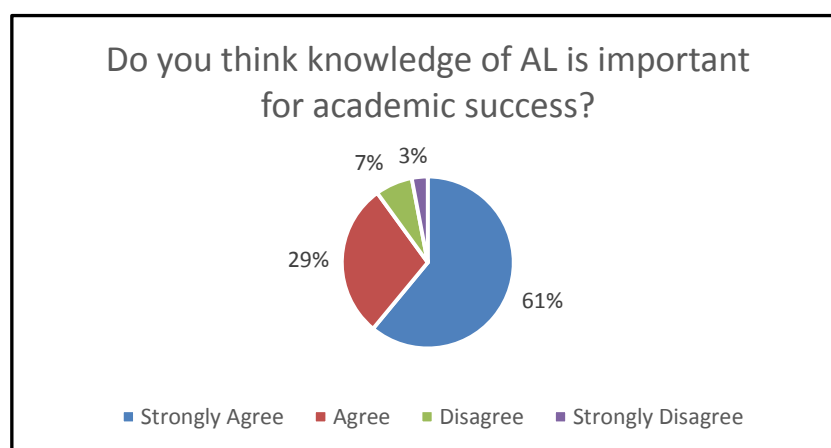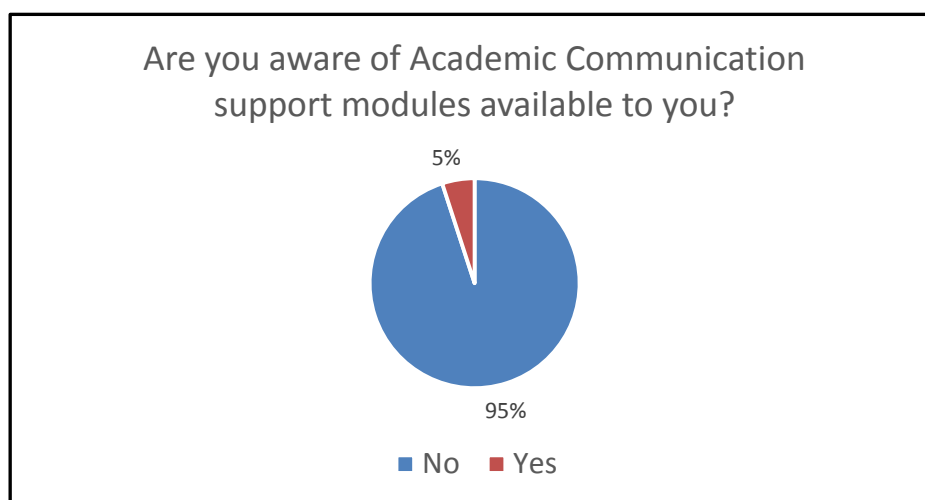

Fig. 1 Student responses to the question 'Do you think knowledge of Academic Literacy is important for academic success?'

[31]As shown in Figure 2, the questionnaire also assessed students' self-evaluations of their knowledge of AL. [32]While the majority disagreed that their knowledge of AL was non-existent, a large majority did acknowledge that their academic literacy skills needed improvement, and were not sufficient. [33]Similarly, a large majority disagreed that their AL skills were excellent.
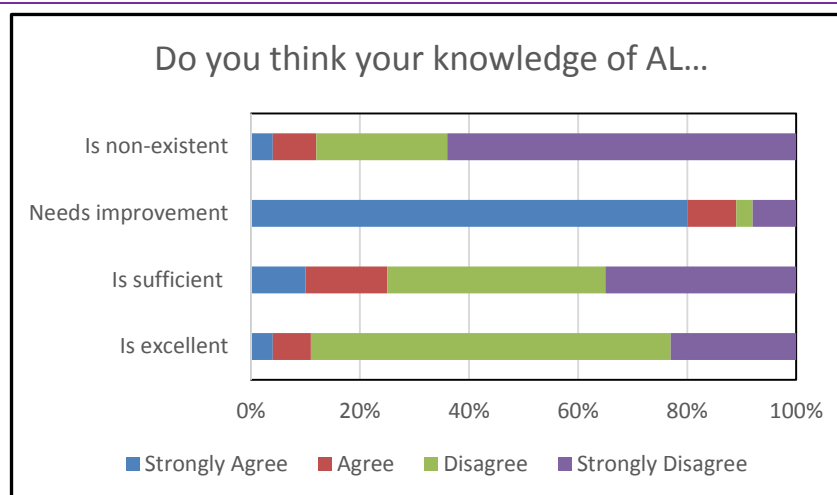
Fig. 2 Students' self-assessment of their Academic Literacy knowledge and skills

[34]While students' awareness of the importance of AL was high, and their self-evaluations indicated that they were also aware that their skills needed improving, they lacked awareness of the resources available to support and develop these skills. [35]In fact, as Figure 3 shows, there was an almost complete lack of awareness of AL support services available to students, with 95% of students saying that they had no knowledge of the AL resources provided by their institution.

Fig. 3 Student responses to the question 'Are you aware of Academic Communication support modules available to you?'

[36]First year university students at Herwon State University understand that AL knowledge is key to academic success, but most do not feel confident that they have sufficient knowledge in this area when they enter university (see Figures 1 and 2 above). [37]These findings align with earlier research in this area (e.g. James & Hoadley, 2014; Herke & Wong, 2016) and provide evidence that first year students are interested in furthering their AL knowledge in order to better realise their academic potential.

[38]However, our research also indicates that, while it is vital that universities provide AL support

resources for their students, provision alone may not be sufficient. [39]Herwon State university provides extensive AL support for students in the form of faculty-specific credit-bearing academic communication modules (Brick, 2013), however it is clear from Figure 3 that students do not take advantage of these modules, primarily because 95% of the students surveyed responded that they were unaware that such units exist. [40]James and Hoadley (2014) uncovered similar findings with regard to student awareness in other UK universities. [41]This is a cause for concern and suggests that universities need to increase their communication with first year students both before, during and after enrolment so that commencing students are fully aware of all AL support resources available to them, including modules for degree credit.

[42]Most first year university students understand the importance of AL knowledge and the positive association between such knowledge and academic success. [43]However, on entering university, most of these students do not consider their AL competency is sufficient to achieve the success they consider themselves capable of, nor are they aware of the resources and credit bearing modules that are available to assist them in this area. [44]Universities should therefore continue to provide a range of opportunities to support their students to enhance AL skills, thus enabling them to realise their full academic potential. [45]However, simply providing support is not enough; universities must communicate to students very early in their enrolment that in order to boost their AL competency, they should enrol in their faculty academic communication module.

References.

Brick, J., Herke, M., Wilson, N., & Wong, D. (2017). *Retention and progression in undergraduate programs: A case-study*. London: Rocco Mortimer Publishers.

Herke, M., & Wong, D. (2016). *Ensuring successful student outcomes in the modern university*. New York: Lionel Press.

James, E., & Hoadley, S. (2014). Want a good degree? Study an academic communication unit. *Higher Education Success*, 9 (13); 29-11.

Morty, T.C., & Daisy, T.G. (2017). Informed students: Assessment outcomes and academic communication support units. *Journal of Successful Student Engagement*, 4 (7); 13-23.

Peters, D., & Herke, M. (2015). University student well-being: Focus and action. *International Journal of Academic Welfare*, 23 (6); 479-510.

Wingate, S.J. (2006). Enrolments and diversity in higher education. *Tertiary Development*, 13 (2); 56-78.

Task 2

Select a research report in your own area of study and answer the questions presented in Task 1.

Task 3

Text 2 is the introduction to a research report on the effect of the internet on peoples' interaction with their families. Read it and answer the following:

1 Summarise the topic of the research report in your own words.

2 Which sentence(s) identify the general topic of the report?

3 Which sentence(s) present the research questions?

4 How many research questions are there?

5 Whose voice is dominant in each stage of the introduction?

6 What are other voices used for?

Text 2

INTRODUCTION

Whether the internet plays a positive or a negative role in peoples' social lives is a topic of ongoing debate. Several scholars report negative effects, ranging from an increased rate of depression (Kraut et al, 1998) to a reduction in the amount of time spent with family and friends (Nie, 2000). However, other scholars have found that the internet enhances social life by developing new ways of connecting with family and friends (Rainie, 2000). Lenhart (2001), for example, found that teenagers in particular use the internet to maintain their social connections, while Fox (2001) reported that the elderly are more likely than any other age group to go online every day.

One reason for these different findings regarding the social impact of the internet is that surveys have been conducted at different points in the internet's development. Patterns of usage that prevailed in the late 1990s do not correspond to patterns of usage in the middle of the first decade of the new millennium. One way of measuring the internet's impact on social life more accurately is to track changes in the use of email by users over a period of time. This study reports on the use of email by a group of users in a large Australian city over a period of five years. The study examined changes in the extent to which email was used to maintain contact with family members, and compared this to users' self-reports of the extent to which they felt connected to family members.