

Introduction to the Introductions Volume

The writing of an introduction to a volume on introductions certainly gives us pause. There is indeed a bit of irony in writing the very kind of text that is the focus of this volume. Even so, we offer here a few thoughts, the writing of which we have left as our final task so that we could take a step back and look at how the materials in this volume actually turned out—in keeping with the first and last comments in Task One on pages 1–2.

In this volume, we have taken our usual genre-based approach with a strong emphasis on rhetorical consciousness-raising. Wherever possible, we have incorporated findings from research to support our views and strengthen the tasks. It is, however, important to note that the published research on introductions has been disproportionately aimed at published articles. Much less is known about introductions for other genres such as dissertations or proposals. Even when research is available, there are sometimes conflicting findings, as in the work on citations in dissertations. Where research is lacking, in order to support our claims and tasks we have done some small studies of introductions ourselves using our students' texts, the Michigan Corpus of Under-level Students Papers (MICUSP), and texts available in journals and on the Internet. Despite our efforts in this regard, more research on introductions beyond those of research articles (RAs) is needed. This is particularly true when we consider that research is increasingly a multi- and interdisciplinary endeavor and that there may be no single best way to write an introduction in such circumstances. Thus, when uncertainties and conflicting ideas do arise while working through this volume, students, instructors, and independent users will need to do some analysis of the language and discourse practices of the fields of their particular interest.

The material presented in this volume is appropriate for graduate students and others already working in their chosen academic fields. The material has, in fact, been used with each of these groups in both writing courses and writing workshops. We believe that the material would also be suitable for those wishing to pursue a course of self-study. To target these different possible uses, we have included a variety of topics and tasks that we hope will deepen users' understanding of how to create a writing context for their

work. Tasks range from evaluating text commentaries to open-ended questions and have been designed to generate lively classroom or workshop discussion as well as thoughtful consideration by an individual user.

As with all of our other volumes, in creating this volume we have envisioned instructors who have fairly extensive EAP teaching experience. We expect that this experience will enable teachers to supplement the material to target the needs of students in classes or in workshops. Teaching priorities and aims will be shaped by a variety of factors, such as whether one is teaching in the U.S. or another country, in a classroom with students who speak English as a first or an additional language, or in a classroom consisting of a multi- or single disciplinary group. Thus, there is no need to work through the topics in the volume in the order given or to cover all of them. For instance, some instructors may find it more useful to start with proposal introductions before research article introductions. Another way to address specific aims is by changing the sample texts in the volume, which come from a range of disciplines. We believe that including work from a variety of disciplines is a strength since this allows instructors, students, and independent users of the volume to consider alternative ways of writing. Comparisons of students' own work with that from other disciplines can be quite enlightening since these comparisons not only suggest other approaches to writing, but can reveal that concerns about language choice, discourse, and rhetoric are common to all writers, regardless of field, first language, or experience. If instructors and students do, however, want or need to focus on writing within a specific discipline, the relatively easy access to articles on the Internet through Google Scholar or publisher databases makes this possible. In many cases, the questions that accompany the sample texts in this volume can be used as is or slightly modified for use with introductions from any discipline. Some support for this latter activity is available in the Online Commentary available to users of this volume. This commentary provides answers for all of the tasks where this is possible. It also contains some teaching advice and further insights into the tasks, which we hope reveal more of the thinking behind the sections and activities.

The choice of content for this volume was rather straightforward in many respects. Of course, no teaching materials focusing on introductions would be complete without the now well-known CaRS model, which was first

introduced in John's groundbreaking *Aspects of Article Introductions*¹ in 1981, further refined in *Genre Analysis*, and again revisited in *Research Genres* and which inspired other scholars to carry out their own research to either fine-tune the model for a particular discipline or perhaps dispute its relevance. Indeed, rightly or wrongly, as one might expect, RA introductions are central to this volume. Rather than suggesting that the CaRS model is the writing goal, however, we offer it as a starting point for RA authors, encouraging them to shape their introductions in light of practices within their own disciplines and the constraints of their research areas.

Beyond the emphasis on the RA introductions, we have also focused on introductions for other kinds of texts that are part of the graduate student writing experience, such as course papers in general and, more specifically, critiques, proposals, and dissertations. We are aware that many of our students have writing needs other than writing for publication and an exclusive emphasis on the latter would be inappropriate. Interestingly, in contrast to the abundance of research on RA introductions, rather less has been written on the introductions to these other genres and pedagogical genres. Thus, to further our understanding of these texts, we were fortunate to be able to turn to the MICUSP. This collection of student written papers includes 830 papers and more than 2.3 million words of running text written in a range of disciplines within the Humanities and Arts, Social Sciences, Biological and Health Sciences, and Physical Sciences at the University of Michigan. Each of the papers received the top grade of A. We also relied heavily on the work of our students in our writing classes, particularly those in ELI 420, Research Paper Writing, and in ELI 620 and 621, Dissertation Writing and Writing for Publication. The availability of these texts allowed our efforts on this volume to be data-driven, even in the absence of published research.

Finally, we welcome any feedback instructors would be willing to share with us. To strengthen the teaching advice portion of the Commentary, for instance, we would be very interested in learning how others have used the tasks or what tasks worked particularly well (or not) with a student group. Feel free to contact us with any observations that could improve this volume and better meet the needs of academic writers.

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¹ To be reissued by the University of Michigan Press in 2011.