

## Developing Discipline-specific Academic Writing Skills

**Date: 28 October 2009 (Wednesday)**

**Time: 12:30 pm – 2:00 pm**

**Venue: B4-1/F-37**

There has been a trend in language and education for learning outcomes, focusing on the awareness of an academic discourse community where both pre- and in-service teachers and educators create and communicate discipline knowledge through academic writing. There has also been a shift in the assessment requirements in language and education programmes from examinations to multiple and multi-mode assessment tasks, involving 'academic writing'. As a result, there is an increasing need among the language and education students for quality 'academic writing' input and training.

This presentation is based on an internal TDG project on the 'Development of an Academic Writing Handbook for Language and Education Students'. The presenter(s) will provide a brief introduction to the project, and discuss a number of issues involved in the development of academic literacy, and discipline-specific academic writing. The presenter(s) will also reveal some of the research findings including the use of reporting verbs, and vocabulary and grammar deviations in the academic texts written by students of language and education major students. For a brief introduction to the TDG project, please visit <http://engres.ied.edu.hk/academicWriting/eHandbook.html>



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## Centre for Language in Education &amp; Graduate Programmes Office

ACADEMIC WRITING SEMINAR SERIES for  
POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS & ACADEMIC STAFF

## Seminar (4)

Collecting and analysing data for  
educational research

In this session we will consider methods of data collection and analysis in educational research. Ways of analysing comparative and descriptive data, as well as data obtained from interviews, print texts, online discussion forums, classroom discourse, and textbooks will be addressed with specific examples. This session will be useful to those who are interested in research on language and education in general.



Speaker: Dr. Marc Xu

Date: 24 Mar 2010 (Wed)

Time: 6 pm – 7:30 pm

Venue: B1-LP-06

*Dr. Marc Xu*

Marc Xu is Assistant Professor in the Department of English at the Hong Kong Institute of Education, from a disciplinary background in Applied Linguistics and Intercultural Education. He is Associate Department Programme Coordinator of Master of Arts in Teaching English as an International Language (MATEIL). Dr. Xu is also the Principal Investigator of a TDG project on developing an Academic Writing Handbook for Students of Language and Education Programmes. He has published book chapters, and articles in international journals including *English Australia Journal*, *World Englishes*, and *Asian Englishes*.

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# DEVELOPING DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS

## OUTLINE

1. Introduction to the TDG Academic Writing project
2. Discipline-specific academic writing (language and education)
3. Academic vocabulary & grammar issues
4. Elements and structures of academic essays and research papers
5. Process-oriented academic writing
6. New dimensions (wiki writing: collaborative writing e-writing ...)

## I. INTRODUCTION

TDG Project: The development of an 'Academic Writing Handbook for Students of Language and Education' (In-progress)

### Paradigm shift:

- 1) from 'examinations' to multiple and multi-mode assessment tasks (academic writing oriented)
- 2) from 'aims' and 'objectives' to learning 'outcomes' (evidence-based)
- 3) from student-teacher relationship to discipline-specific academic discourse community network building (Swain's concept of 'linguaging': collaborative dialogues, output-input hypothesis, and task-based learning)
- 4) from bi-directional paper writing to multi-dimensional interactive e-writing (with hyperlinks and data-base, e-resources and RefWorks)

## Needs of the students

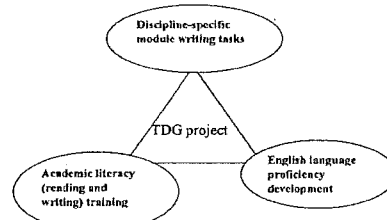
- 1) BA & BEd Programme survey (2007)  
*The programme should include modules related to academic writing (2)*  
*It would be better if a specific course on academic writing is introduced at an earlier stage.*
- 2) BEd (EL) Programme survey (2008)  
*We ourselves explore a lot of resources related to the module through essay writing. I have learned a lot of academic writing skills in essay writing.*  
*Written assignment is practical and it helps us to understand better about the things taught in the module.*  
*Essay writing involves much knowledge and experience.*

## Our awareness:

*The students are generally*

- a. *inexperienced in academic writing;*
- b. *in great need to improve their English proficiency;*
- c. *lacking knowledge of academic writing conventions (including referencing);*
- d. *heavily exposed to Netspeak writing style on a daily basis (e.g. emails, MSN, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Second Life), and therefore they tend to mix the genres of speech and writing*
- e. *not accustomed to process-writing, or revising and editing their drafts.*

Our TDG project is trying to link 'English language proficiency' development with 'academic literacy (reading and writing)' training and 'discipline-specific module writing tasks'



The Academic Writing Handbook has the following features:

- 1) it is not generic, but discipline-specific
- 2) it is not encyclopaedic but based on the needs of our students
- 3) it combines theories with practical and pedagogical advice
- 4) it is in both print and online versions

(<http://engres.led.edu.hk/academicWriting/eHandbook.html>)

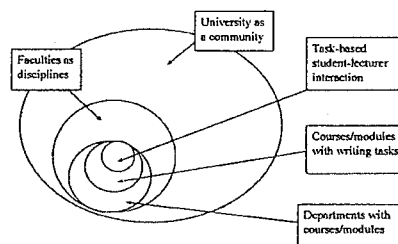
## II. DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC ACADEMIC WRITING (LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION)

University studies primarily centre around 'learning to write' and 'writing to learn'. What the students learn and write is closely related to their subject content / 'disciplinary schemata' (Zhu, 2004, p. 32).

The differences in the writing requirements between secondary school graduates and first year university students

	CEE (Mainland)	HKALE	HKIED (Yr 1) Module (ENG1244)
Number of words	100	500	1000 + 1000 (3000-4000 for a group)
Time duration	30 minutes	1 hour 15 minutes	within 10 weeks
Individual/collaborative writing	individual	individual	individual/collaborative
Referencing	no, or implicit	no, or implicit	explicit
Writing style	non- or semi-academic	non- or semi-academic	academic
Discipline areas	general	general	specific
Product/Process orientation	product oriented	product oriented	process oriented

## Academic writing as a disciplinary discourse community practice



Academic writing is highly discipline-specific

It is important to be aware that **academic writing**, unlike other genres of writing, is **highly discipline-specific**. University students entering specific disciplines need **a specialized literacy**, i.e. a discipline-specific way of acquiring new knowledge.

## Continuum of academic knowledge

SCIENCES	SOCIAL SCIENCES	HUMANITIES
Empirical and objective		Explicitly interpretive
Linear and cumulative growth		Dispersed knowledge
Experimental methods		Discursive argument
Quantitative		Qualitative
More concentrated readership		More varied readership
Highly structured genres		More fluid discourses

(Hyland, 2008, p. 550)

## Variations across disciplines

In the humanities and social sciences, analyzing and synthesizing information from multiple sources is important while in science and technology subjects, activity-based skills like describing procedures, defining objects, and planning solutions are required.” (Hyland, 2008, p. 550)

## A categorization of disciplines and their typical written texts

Sciences	Social Sciences	Humanities/Arts	Applied Disciplines
physics, chemistry, biology, geology	sociology, geography, economics, politics, cultural and media studies, psychology	English, history, languages, fine art, music, religious studies	business and management, engineering, health and social welfare
Typical text types:			
laboratory reports, project proposals and reports, fieldwork notes, essays, dissertations	essays, project reports, fieldwork notes, dissertations	essays, critical analysis, translations, projects	essays, case studies, dissertations, projects

(Coffin et al., 2003, p. 46)

## III. ACADEMIC VOCABULARY & GRAMMAR ISSUES

Classification of English vocabulary

- 1) High frequency words, e.g., GSL (West 1953),
- 2) Academic vocabulary, e.g., UWL (Xue and Nation 1984) and AWL Coxhead (2000),
- 3) Technical vocabulary (Discipline-specific vocabulary), and
- 4) Low frequency words. (Nation, 2001)

## Academic vocabulary

Hyland & Tse (2007, p. 249) regard academic vocabulary as a cline of technically loaded or specialized words ranging from terms which are only used in a particular discipline to those which share some features of meaning and use with words in other fields.

## Reporting verbs across disciplines

Verbs play an important role in academic writing. Hyland (2008, p. 553) argues that different disciplines have slightly different preferences for reporting verbs.

Discipline	Most frequent verbs
Philosophy	say, suggest, argue, claim, propose
Sociology	argue, suggest, describe, discuss, note
Applied Linguistics	suggest, argue, show, explain, point out
Marketing	suggest, argue, demonstrate, propose
Biology	describe, find, report, show, observe
Electrical Engineering	show, propose, use, report, describe
Mechanical Engineering	show, report, describe, discuss
Physics	develop, report, study

(Hyland, 2008, p. 553)

## Our survey on ‘reporting verbs’ shows that ...

Commonly used reporting verbs by first year university students of language and education majors include: *state, define, suggest, point out, propose, mention, indicate, regard, comment, insist, believe, estimate, pinpoint, say, put*

Experienced writers in ‘sociology’ and ‘applied linguistics’ tend to use *argue, suggest, show, describe, explain, discuss, propose, cite, state, claim, consider, point out, call, term, include, report, define, and note caution* (Hyland, 1995, Pickard, 1995)

Observation: Our students seldom use the verb *argue*, while experienced writers seldom use *mention, believe* and *say*.



### Common vocabulary errors

Error type	Examples	Notes
types	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Morphology stemmed from a Greek word morphē which refers to form, shape. [from]</li> </ul>	
Inappropriate choice of words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To assist in explaining ... few examples are extracted ... to perform a complete demonstration. [a few, or a number of]</li> <li>There are totally eight inflectional morphemes in English. [There are in total eight inflectional morphemes in English.]</li> </ul>	
misuse of prepositions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>when they are eager to enlarge their vocabulary solely in the basis of the words they have known. [on]</li> </ul>	
misuse of set expressions/phrases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>as follows: [as follows]</li> <li>Morphemes can be classified as follows: [as follows]</li> </ul>	
style or register / formality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They are meaningless when they are alone. [That is to say, ... in other words, ...]</li> <li>Q. Henry once said, "Most wonderful of all are words, and how they make friends one with each other." From his words, we can conclude that words are actually interrelated rather than being isolated.</li> </ul>	

### Common vocabulary errors

Error type	Examples	Notes
the use of 'etc.'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They are always ordinary nouns, adjectives and verbs, etc. [and other parts of speech.]</li> </ul>	
singularity / plurality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>... while derivational and inflectional morphemes are affixes. [affixes]</li> <li>Free morpheme can be divided into ... [morphemes]</li> </ul>	
verb inflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>According to what Andrew Spencer &amp; Arnold M. Zwicky writes on the online journal ... [wrote]</li> <li>Those elements that can stand by themselves as words are called free morphemes. [called]</li> <li>They are known as 'open' classes of words [open]</li> <li>There are also 'close' classes of words. [closed]</li> </ul>	
misuse of parts of speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>morphology has also been used to describe the type of investigation that analysis all those morphemes used in a language. [analyses]</li> <li>Boo! defined "morpheme" as the smallest linguistic unit with a lexical meaning. [linguistic]</li> <li>... they are not used as frequently as free morphemes [frequency]</li> </ul>	

### Common grammatical errors

Top ten sentence problems in students writing (adapted from Ralmes 2006, p. 355)

Type of error	Example of error
1. Fragment	She had an ambitious dream. To become a CEO.
2. Run-on sentence or comma splice	The city is lively the clubs are open late. The city is lively, the clubs are open late.
3. Sentence snarl	In the essay "Notes of a Native Son" by James Baldwin discusses his feelings about his father.
4. Wrong verb form or tense	They have never drank Coke.
5. Tense shift	Footo wrote about Shiloh and describes his aftermath.
6. Lack of subject-verb agreement	The owner have gone bankrupt.
7. Pronoun error	The coach rebuked my teammates and I.
8. Pronoun case and reference	When I crossed the border, they searched my backpack.
9. Adjective/adverb confusion	The Diamondbacks played good in spring training.
10. Double negative	They don't have no luck.

### Common grammatical errors by students of language and education

- 1) the misuse of articles,
- 2) improper modality,
- 3) improper passive/active voice,
- 4) lack of subject-verb agreement,
- 5) lack of number agreement,
- 6) inaccurate reference,
- 7) misuse of tense,
- 8) unclear 'it',
- 9) misuse of -ing form/infinitive,
- 10) improper clauses,
- 11) missing connectives,
- 12) improper possessive forms, and
- 13) negative mother tongue influence.

### Strategies for improving academic vocabulary and grammar

#### Vocabulary

- 1) Explicitly learning UWL and AWL and building up personalized academic word lists based on module studies and personal academic vocabulary competence,
- 2) Adopting explicit vocabulary learning strategies, e.g., 'discovery strategies' and 'consolidation strategies' (Schmitt, 1997, p. 206),
- 3) Learning knowledge of word-building processes, particularly derivation processes (prefixes and suffixes).

### Strategies for improving academic vocabulary and grammar

#### Grammar:

- 4) good academic writing comes from good academic reading and research,
- 5) grammatically correct academic writing is often a result of careful revising and editing,
- 6) be aware of the most common types of grammar errors in academic writing, and build up a monitoring mechanism
- 7) be aware of the importance of grammatical correctness.

#### IV. ELEMENTS AND STRUCTURES OF ACADEMIC ESSAYS AND RESEARCH PAPERS

Different elements and structures for essays and research papers

The structure of an essay (adapted from Coffin, et al. 2003, p. 22)

(Introduction) Overall position / argument
(Body) Sub-arguments and supporting evidence
(Conclusion) Reinforcement of overall position / argument
References

#### Different elements and structures for essays and research papers

The structure of a research paper (adapted from Coffin, et al. 2003, p. 23)

Introduction / background
Literature review
Research questions and methodology
An account of the research process and research findings
Evaluation/discussion/analysis
Conclusion / implications
References
Appendices

Criteria for a 'good' essay or extended writing assignments for a language and education programme at HKIED

Overall presentation	Conforms in all respects to Programme presentation guidelines.
Organisation	Adequate essay structure. The text is generally coherent and logical, though examples may be lacking and links may be missing at times. There is some evidence of audience and text awareness.
Introduction	Essay includes an introduction, which clearly and concisely establishes context, focus and direction.
Conclusion	Good summary of main points. Restatement of relationship to central contention / argument / purpose and essay topic / question.
Degree to which question is answered	The topic / question is fully answered. The writer demonstrates a good understanding of the topic / context of the task, with satisfactory supporting evidence.
Effort & research input	Evidence of wide, relevant reading.

Criteria for a 'good' essay or extended writing assignments for a language and education programme at HKIED

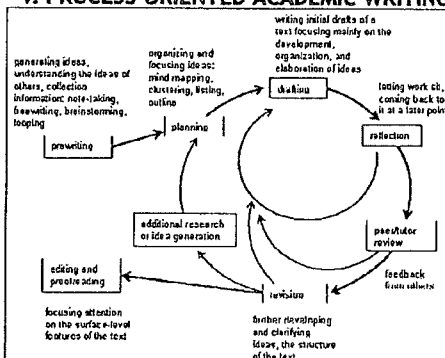
Critical thought	Evidence of analysis of presented materials. Relationships between ideas clearly demonstrated.
Writing style & vocabulary	Confidence in language use is evident but there may be some L1 characteristics. A range of task-specific and / or general vocabulary is accurately and appropriately used.
Grammar	Grammatical structures are on the whole accurate but errors that do not impede communication may occur regularly. Some complex structures are attempted.
Internal referencing	The writer shows a good understanding of internal referencing with some minor errors.
Reference list	All reference books are clearly listed. The reference list follows the conventions of the HKIED referencing system. Very few errors are evident in the reference list.

#### V. PROCESS-ORIENTED ACADEMIC WRITING

Academic writing as a multitasking process:

Reading, taking notes, interpreting, critical thinking, brainstorming, mind-mapping, outlining, drafting, (referencing), revising, (peer/tutor) reviews, editing, proofreading ... ..

#### V. PROCESS-ORIENTED ACADEMIC WRITING



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### Academic writing as an interactive process:

A fundamental principle of process approaches is that writing is an interactive process. Thus, where possible, writing assignments or tasks should build from opportunities for students to revise a piece of work in response to feedback from peer reviewers or the lecturer (Coffin et al., 2003, p. 37)

### VI. NEW DIMENSIONS (COLLABORATIVE WRITING, E-WRITING, WIKI WRITING, MAKING USE OF ONLINE RESOURCES, WRITING WITH REFWORKS)

- A focus on the Wiki-book writing project

### THE WIKIBOOK PROJECT

- Implementation of a student-authored online wikibook project to promote academic reading and writing among Year 1 English major students at the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd)

### ASSESSMENT TASK: STUDENT-AUTHORED WIKIBOOK PROJECT

- Students work in groups of 3 or 4, and each group member contributes 1000 words to a chapter of a student-authored academic book 'Introduction to Language Studies' based on the topics introduced in the module.
- Each chapter must also include 10 multiple-choice comprehension questions based on the content of the chapter.

### OTHER REQUIREMENTS IN THE WIKIBOOK PROJECT

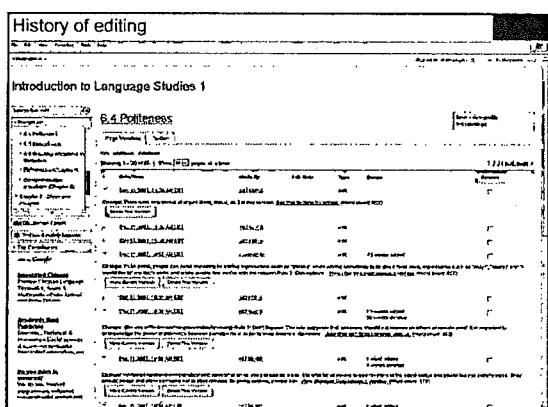
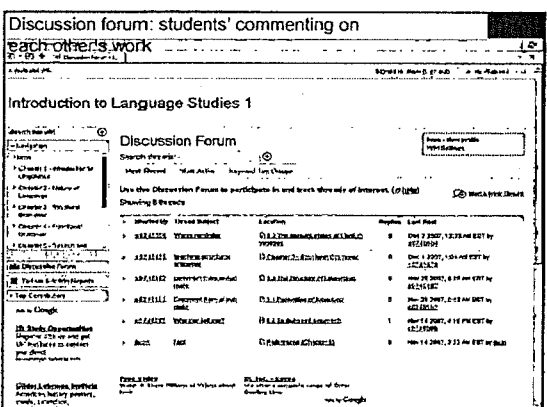
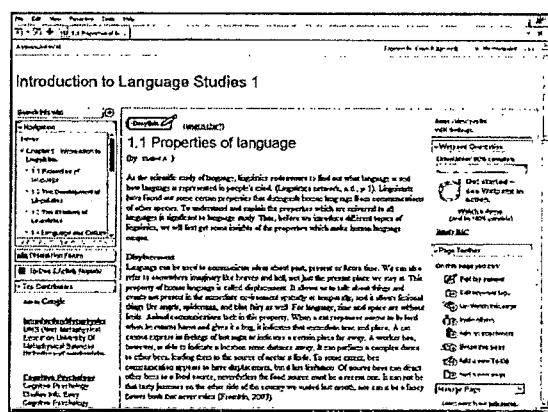
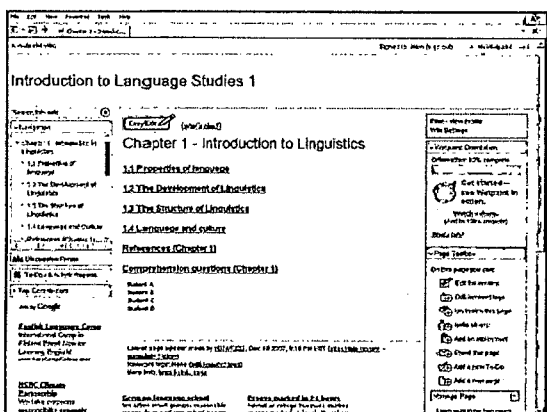
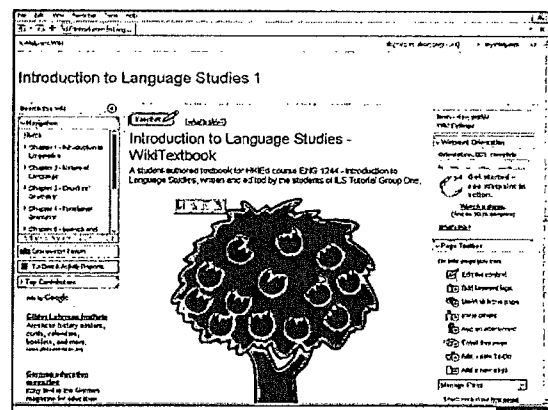
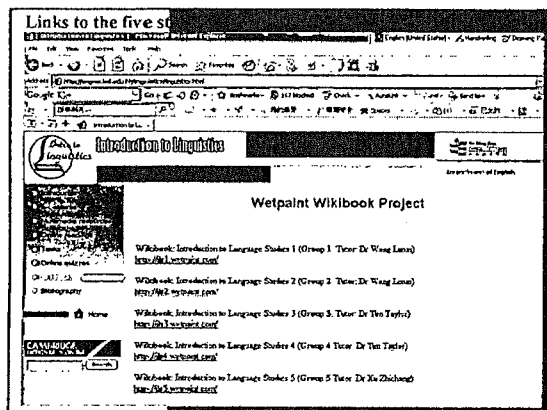
- Group members are required to peer edit each other's section in the corresponding chapter of the book.
- A draft of the group chapter must be posted on the Wetpaint wikibook website online according to schedule. Chapter drafts are due periodically throughout the semester, according to the order that topics are introduced in class.
- Meeting the draft posting deadline is essential to allow ample opportunities for tutor feedback and peer editing.
- Members in the same group receive the same group grade.

### WHY WIKI?

- Wiki-based English writing classes positively affect the students' English writing proficiency.
- Wikis are beneficial for collaborative writing.
- Wikis are fun for practicing English composition.

(Pae, 2007)





## PEER EDITING

Group members are required to peer edit each other's section in the corresponding chapter of the book to ensure:


- each section includes sufficient details
- the writing is polished (academic style, appropriate referencing, etc.)
- the whole chapter is coherent

## Screenshots of peer editing comments

**Threads** [Click a New Thread](#)

Started By	Thread Subject	Replies	Last Post
15748102	Comment from anonymous member	0	Nov 26 2007, 5:52 AM EDT by 15748102

Thread started: Nov 26 2007, 5:52 AM EDT (UTC)

 wonderful introduction! Clear structure!  
 It will be better if the space between two paragraphs is the same.  
 PB: I have made an answer list in "Comprehension Questions". We can put the answers there.  
 Do you find this valuable? (0) (0)  
 Keyword tags: 1.6 (0) (0) (0) (0) (0)


[Back to Reply](#)

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**Threads** [Click a New Thread](#)

Started By	Thread Subject	Replies	Last Post
15748102	Comment from anonymous member	0	Nov 26 2007, 6:00 AM EDT by 15748102

Thread started: Nov 26 2007, 6:00 AM EDT (UTC)

 It is really a great work since there are so many good examples in it, which enrich the content of the passage.  
 Ask your multiple questions and answers in...  
 I out of 1 found this valuable. Do you? (0) (0)  
 Keyword tags: None (0) (0) (0) (0) (0)

[Back to Reply](#)

## SUMMARY OF PEER EDITING COMMENTS – PRAISING PEERS' WORK

### Examples of comments

- wonderful introduction! Clear structure!
- it is really a great work since there are so many good examples in it, which enrich the content of the passage.
- After reading your section, I can fully understand the differences between Semantic and Pragmatics. I was attracted by your lively examples. They are really interesting and clear.

## SUMMARY OF PEER EDITING COMMENTS – MAKING SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING DRAFT

### Examples of comments

- It will be better if the space between two paragraphs is the same.
- The second paragraph: 'this section', not 'the paper'. We are writing a section of a book!
- You just use Cutting's book as your reference; it seems to be proper that you add some theories from other writers.
- ...but as regards the citations...maybe you could change those citations into your own words, for it seems to be more pleasant to read without many quotes. Good luck!

## SUMMARY OF PEER EDITING COMMENTS – DISCUSSING TEAMWORK / REQUESTING FOR HELP

### Examples of comments

- I have made an answer list in "Comprehension Questions". We can put the answers there.
- Do we need to add a REFERENCE LIST in a textbook?
- Somebody see my page? what's going on? why the paragraphs are so far away from each other? but when i click "easy edit", there is totally no space between every paragraph!- help me-----

## SUMMARY OF PEER EDITING COMMENTS – PROVIDING NEW INFORMATION ON CONTENT

### Examples of comments

- Pragmatics is the study of what speakers mean, or "speakers meaning". In fact, it is the study of "invisible" meaning, of how we recognize what is meant even when it isn't actually said or written.
- Semantics and pragmatics are the branches of theoretical linguistics. Semantics is the study of the meaning of words, phrases and sentences. In semantic analysis, there is always an attempt to focus on what the words conventionally mean, rather than what a speaker might want the words to mean on a particular occasion...

### SUMMARY OF REFERENCE STATISTICS

Average per chapter:  $180/9 = 20$

Compared with individual written essays:

Average 3 references per essay (Task 1)

### WIKI-VOICES: A QUALITATIVE SURVEY

• One tutorial group (32 participants)

• Wiki-Voices

- "New/good/interesting/valuable/fantastic" experience
- Good cooperation/collaboration/together-ness
- Good development of academic skills
- Happiness and relief associated with hard work

### Works cited

(Belanoff, Rorschach, & Oberlink, 1993; Byrd & Benson, 1989; Coffin et al., 2003; Cooper & Bikowski, 2007; Coxhead, 2000; Cumming, 2006; Dames, 2007; Dorman & Dees, 2010; Elander, Harrington, Norton, Robinson, & Reddy, 2006; Fox, 1999; Heffernan & Lincoln, 1994; Hyland, 1995; Hyland, 2000; Hyland, 2008; Langosch, 1996; Lea & Street, 2000; Lester & Beason, 2005; Lewkowicz, 1994; Maimon, Peritz, & Yancey, 2005; Miller & Knowles, 1997; Mitchell, 2007)



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