



## Book Review

Fang, Z. (2021). *Demystifying academic writing: Genres, moves, skills, and strategies*. Routledge.

by **Kiatipong Rerkwanchai**

Writing academic articles, theses, and dissertations is a daunting task, often intimidating novices and sometimes veterans alike. Laying bare rhetorical moves, skills, linguistic strategies and resources, while offering concrete guidelines, Fang's book *Demystifying Academic Writing* will therefore prove beneficial for aspiring academic writers.

Following the premise of Systematic Functional Linguistics, the author points out early that this book conceives of language “as an interlocking system of lexical and grammatical options for making meaning” (p. xiiv) instead of rigid sets of grammar rules to be followed. Hence, readers will be provided with ready-to-use sentences and phrases that will help them express their intentions more effectively, without being overwhelmed with linguistic jargon, an aspect that will appeal to those with little or no linguistic backgrounds.

*Demystifying Academic Writing* is divided into three sections, with each containing between 2-6 chapters. At the end of each chapter are a brief synopsis of key points, reflection and application activities, and references that will direct readers to other valuable resources.

The first section, “Unpacking Academic Writing,” offers an overview of academic writing, highlighting the advanced linguistic features and literacy skills required for academic writing purposes. As many novice writers may consider academic writing monolithic, having experience in only a few types (usually academic essays and empirical research articles), Fang is quick to remind them in Chapter 1 that there are many genres of academic writing, and each genre has its own purposes and requires different approaches and linguistic moves. Therefore, some rhetorical moves effective in one instance may not be applicable to others.

In Chapter 2, Fang provides a discussion of common characteristics of academic writing such as density, abstraction, and rigor in order to distinguish academic writing from everyday writing. Chapters 3 and 4 delve into literacy skills and writing strategies such as

contextualizing, quoting, summarizing, disagreeing and agreeing, defining, referencing visuals, and entertaining opposing views. Readers, especially less experienced writers, may find concrete and ready-to-use templates, which are drawn from various academic disciplines, extremely useful.

The next section, “Writing Academic Genres,” consists of 6 chapters, all devoted to discussing six types of common academic writing genres, including reading response, book review, literature review, argumentative essay, empirical research article, and grant proposal. Each chapter begins with a definition of the genre being discussed, followed by rhetorical moves and writing samples. The analyses that accompany the samples help shed light on how to read them.

Two aspects, in my opinion, deserve recognition here. Firstly, while a detailed discussion of all the six types of writing genres is commendable, many readers will appreciate a discussion of grant proposals—an important genre that is often missing in many academic writing books. Secondly, Chapter 9, which discusses “Writing Empirical Articles,” is relatively comprehensive compared to the other six chapters in this section. Graduate students will find this chapter especially valuable, as the author breaks down and discusses each section of the research article (e.g., introduction, literature review, and methods) in light of rhetorical moves.

“Maximizing Success in Writing and Publishing,” which is the final section, provides tips, strategies, and guidance for success in academic writing, while assisting readers in navigating the complex process of writing for publication. The penultimate chapter in particular provides tips on how to cultivate good academic writing habits. While the author provides general guidelines which can be found in many texts of this kind such as reading widely, he stresses the importance of choosing the right language for the right purpose—“Equipping yourself with different ways of saying essentially the same thing gives you choices that serve your needs and intentions, enabling you to demonstrate your own stylistic and rhetorical competence in academic writing,” (p. 224), a theme running through the book. What is also noteworthy is that, as a second language writer himself, Fang discusses the cultural barriers in academic writing. Being educated in China and trained to write in a specific way, he understands the challenges writers from non-Western backgrounds face. Therefore, his advice on how to cope with this issue can be of immense help for students who share a similar background with him.

The final chapter, where he discusses the publication process ranging from submitting a manuscript to responding to reviewers, is highly informative. In addition to providing an overview of the whole process, the chapter includes correspondence samples (such as email responses to editors or sample letters requesting minor revisions) which could be advantageous for graduate students who may find the whole process a mystery.

As this book aims to discuss various kinds of academic writing, there are many writing aspects that are not covered. Master's and doctoral students, for example, may find the literature review section lacking. Thus, at some point, his guidance may prove inadequate, and readers are advised to consult other sources as well.

Despite these limitations, this text will greatly benefit academic writers at all levels. Readers will appreciate the numerous user-friendly templates and copious examples presented as they can be tools to help them communicate their ideas more effectively and purposefully.

### **Affiliation**

**Kiatipong Rerkwanchai** is an independent researcher and a freelance writing/reading teacher whose interests encompass the intersection between language and social issues, critical approaches to language in use, and writing studies.