

Copyright © 2005 Ken Friedman.

This is the author’s version of the work. It is posted here with the permission of the publisher for your personal use. No further distribution is permitted. If your library has a subscription to this journal, you may also be able to access the published version via the library catalogue.

Accessed from Swinburne Research Bank: http://hdl.handle.net/1959.3/588849

Ken Friedman

As postgraduate design education moves from craft-based guild training to research-based study and learning, degree programs require writing. This involves preparing students for professional design practice as well as research practice. Whichever track they pursue, many students face problems in writing at the postgraduate level. Despite this fact, few schools are adding academic skills courses and fewer still are hiring experienced academic staff to teach the few courses that exist. These problems are made worse by the fact that few senior design teachers have the academic writing skills to match their professional design skills. This book offers students - and their teachers - a compact, effective approach to developing writing skills for academic success.

Gail Craswell is a senior advisor to graduate students at the Australian National University Academic Skills and Learning Centre. She advises students from all the fields and disciplines at ANU, and this book develops general skills. Craswell's book offers a crisp, focused narrative and an intelligible structure, together with useful cases, highlight blocks, examples, and appropriate exercises.

There is value to the general approach. The design field requires discipline-specific research methods and academic skills as all fields do. Nevertheless, discipline-specific skills function on the level of individual research program than on the level of general skills and methods.

General skills are common across disciplines. These include effective writing, appropriate referencing, and searching the literature, along with the skills of rhetorical development and sound argumentation. Postgraduate design students need them all.

Professional designers must communicate effectively with many kinds of clients, and they must prepare convincing research reports to explain their work or to propose projects. Craswell's approach involves developing the broad range of general skills that help students and professionals work effectively for different audiences. University design staff must participate in many kinds of projects and programs, and they, too, must communicate effectively with scholars and administrators from many fields. This book will help them. Most important, research students in every field need the skills that this book teaches.
The book has two main parts. The first part addresses general issues in academic writing and communication, starting with the challenge of managing the context of academic writing. Common sense and experience are the foundation of useful comments on self-management, effective planning, and avoiding the occupational hazards of writing. Managing the act of writing focuses on the different problems and tasks a writer will face. These range from multiple tasks to communicating with teachers and supervisors.

Craswell then moves to the mechanics of preparation. Here, the voice of an experienced advisor becomes central in helping new writers to identify the kinds of writing required for the graduate writing culture, and in identifying the key problems of critical inquiry and critical use of sources. One of the most common problems I have observed in reviewing papers for design conferences and journals is the uncritical acceptance of any published source as a sound foundation for empirical truth claims. Craswell helps students to avoid this mistake, and she shows new writers how to read effectively with an appropriate balance of intensive reading for depth and skimming for a broad overview.

The third chapter considers current practices - the writer's own practices, and practices in the field. Along with a discussion of academic writing mechanics, plagiarism and referencing practice, Craswell asks writers to consider the needs of their readers. She also devotes an important section to clear writing, giving examples of "low-fat writing" that show how careful editing can improve bloated prose.

Craswell's fourth chapter discusses how to develop the text as a whole. Her suggestions on how to develop a visual map of the material are especially useful for visually oriented design students. She attends to sentence structure, paragraph development, linking, and overall structure issues in a way that will help design students to understand the nature of writing as a craft.

The five chapters in the second part of the book discuss specific issues involved in several major writing types. These include chapters on: research essays, book reviews, articles reviews, and coursework papers; literature review, reports, and research proposals; thesis writing; oral and visual presentations; and - finally - journal articles and books.

These chapters are rich with detailed, step-by-step explanations that will be as useful to experienced writers as to students. Clear, specific advice with concise steps for succeeding at each kind of writing makes each chapter a valuable tool. Writers will
want to read the book once through for content and understanding, returning to review specific chapters - and use them - when specific writing tasks make each chapter most useful.

Gail Craswell has written an excellent book. Design Research News recommends Writing for Academic Success for students and research supervisors, as well as for design school libraries.