

**HIGHER EDUCATION BUSINESS WRITING PRACTICES IN OFFICE  
MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY PROGRAMMES AND IN RELATED  
WORKPLACES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The impact of globalisation on the workplace demands that individuals must be prepared to respond to rapid technological and knowledge changes. While the courses offered by the various Universities of Technology take into account the role of the workplace, very little research exists on the impact of career-focussed programmes and how these meet or do not meet workplace requirements. This thesis discusses a research project conducted with Office Management and Technology students and compares the writing practices of higher education with those of related workplaces.

The research problem that is investigated in this thesis is how students transfer knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in higher education to workplaces. In order to address this problem, the research was guided by the questions: 1) what are the business writing practices of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year Communication students? 2) What are the business writing practices of office managers? 3) What are the 'gaps' in the business writing practices between higher education Office Management and Technology programmes and related workplaces? and 4) How can these gaps be addressed to ensure the adequate preparation of Office Management and Technology students for the workplaces of the future?

This comparative study used both quantitative and qualitative methods and collected and produced documentary data, questionnaires, observations and interviews at both higher education and workplace sites. The findings show patterns of alignment and non-alignment across the writing practices of higher education and workplaces. Recommendations are made about the alignment of writing practices, for the mutual benefit of students and workplaces.

The contribution of this research comprises a theoretical contribution to communication knowledge as well as a number of practical contributions to improve the way in which business writing is taught. A theoretical framework for the analysis and comparison of higher education and workplace communication data has been developed and a comparative study has shown the differences between higher education and workplace communication. Higher education and workplaces are different and their communication practices need to embody these significant differences. This study has shown where there can be constructive alignment between higher education and workplace communication practices to the benefit of both student learning and workplaces. The implementation of the recommendations should result in Office Management and Technology students being better prepared to face the demands and challenges of the different and complex world of the workplace into which they will enter on completion of their studies.

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## GLOSSARY

### ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AT	Activity Theory
ANC	African National Congress
CMC	Computer-mediated communication
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
ESL	English Second Language
HE	Higher Education
HG	Higher Grade
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQF	Higher Education Qualifications Framework
ND: OMT	National Diploma: Office Management and Technology
NQF	National Qualifications Authority Framework
NLS	New Literacy Studies
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
OMT	Office Management and Technology
SAP	Systems Application Programming
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
UT	University of Technology

### TERMS

Business writing	Writing that has a specific workplace purpose, audience, stakeholders and context.
Genre systems	Sequences of interrelated communicative actions identified by their socially recognised purpose and common characteristics of form.
Technical writing	Writing done for, or in preparation for, some professional purposes and can include various forms of professional writing.

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## **CHAPTER 1: BUSINESS WRITING IN A WORLD OF TECHNOLOGY**

Writing is pervasive and powerful in modern societies. Indeed, modern societies are unthinkable without the marks on surfaces, the inscriptions, we call writing (Russell, 1997: 224).

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter explains the focus of this study, provides background information on the changing workplace, and contextualises the study of business writing in South African workplaces and higher education (HE) sites. The chapter concludes with an overview of the thesis.

### **1.2 Focus of this research**

The focus of this research is the preparation of Office Management and Technology (OMT) students for the world of work. This study investigates business writing practices in workplaces and compares these to the business writing practices within the OMT departments of Universities of Technology (UTs).

The purpose of this comparative study is to provide UTs with a better understanding of what is required in the workplace by identifying the potential gaps which exist in the UT curriculum for the mutual benefit of students and potential employers. While the OMT curriculum needs to be responsive to the current needs of the workplace, students also need to be prepared for the workplace of the future.

The educational relevance of this research relates to some of the stated objectives of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) which are: to “facilitate mobility and progression within education and training, and career paths, to enhance the quality of education and training, and to accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities’ (Allais, 2003: 1).

This research project takes account of the local, regional and global context of the role of business writing in HE and the workplace. The purpose of this research is to identify opportunities to enhance communication practices of the OMT curriculum by comparing business writing practices in the OMT Department with those in the workplace, in order better to equip students for the positions of office managers.

The research problem that is investigated in this thesis is how students transfer knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in HE to workplaces. In order to address this research problem it is important to

investigate learning practices in HE and compare these with similar learning practices in workplaces for the purposes of conceptualising curricula, pedagogies and assessment tasks that would adequately prepare students for participation across a range of workplaces.

The research objectives are:

- To understand the business writing practices of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year OMT students.
- To understand the writing practices of office managers in the workplace.
- To determine the nature of the gaps between HE and the workplace with regard to business writing practices.
- To recommend a framework for effective classroom based interventions to facilitate competent workplace-based business writing activities.

The guiding research questions are as follows:

1.2.1 What are the business writing practices of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year Communication students?

This research question addresses the theoretical underpinnings of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year Communication courses. In order to answer this question a record was developed of the business writing practices for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year OMT students at three UT campuses.

1.2.2 What are the business writing practices of office managers?

The business writing practices in the workplace are varied and essential to successful communication practices. The writing practices of office managers and novice employees in the workplace were identified.

1.2.3 What are the 'gaps' in the business writing practices between HE OMT programmes and related workplaces?

In order to answer this question the research had to determine the nature of the gap between HE and the workplace with regard to business writing practices.

1.2.4 How can these gaps be addressed to ensure the adequate preparation of OMT students for the workplaces of the future?

The researcher recommends a framework for effective classroom-based interventions to facilitate competent workplace-based business writing activities.

### **1.3 Changing contexts and the impact of Globalisation**

The contexts in which UTs operate have changed constantly. Globalisation has had a profound effect on technology, the workplace and education and presents academic staff with enormous challenges to prepare students for increasingly complex and changing worlds (Barnett, 2004).

#### 1.3.1 Globalisation and technology

The communications and information revolutions, combined with increased mobility of people, services and goods, have contributed to the evolution of globalisation (Stromquist & Monkman, 2000). The internet has become a major communication medium and large firms have become victims of the 'global village' whilst small firms have been provided with growth opportunities, but also increased competition (Grant & Borchers, 2002).

These technological changes have expanded the boundaries and requirements in the world of business communication skills. The production of knowledge has been accelerated by knowledge-based technologies which have had major effects on the technological, social and business contexts in which business communication is practised in the workplace. It has become known as the 'Network Age' (Castells, 2000) or the 'Knowledge Economy' (Neef, 2004).

#### 1.3.2 Globalisation and the workplace

The impact of globalisation and the 'Knowledge Economy' demands that workplaces become knowledge production sites (Chappell, 2000) with new organisational and management practices and structures (Drucker, 2001; Recklies, 2003). Management structures have become flatter with fewer hierarchical levels with the emphasis on establishing networks between organisations, regions and countries (Castells, 2000). The new workplace calls for individuals who can respond to rapid changes in knowledge and technology (Castells, 2001), who are flexible and participate in teamwork and the building of networks on many levels (Cys, 2000).

The challenge facing HE institutions is how they respond to the expectations of the knowledge society which demands that students are expected to leave universities and UTs with 'a set of competencies that make them employable on the global labour market' (Lillejord, 2005: 1316).

#### 1.3.3 Globalisation and South Africa

The legacy of apartheid has had to be addressed by the government of the new democratic South Africa. In addition, the new democratic government has had to face the challenges of economic competitiveness in a changing global environment (GCIS, 2003). These pressures have influenced the national, regional and local contexts in transforming South Africa (Boland, 2000). This has resulted in tensions between reduced public expenditure on education, and the demands for increased accessibility

to HE and increasing education levels to meet the demand for economic growth (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002). Since 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) as the governing party has introduced macro-level policies such as the policy for Growth, Equity and Reconstruction and the Reconstruction and Development Programme which has supported the transformation processes (Odora Hoppers, 2002).

### *Globalisation and Higher Education*

The debate regarding the role of HE in South Africa, incorporates views of HE becoming part of a global 'Knowledge Society' (Griesel, 2000) in line with HE systems elsewhere in the industrialised world (Gultig, 2000) while the National Plan for Higher Education (Ministry of Education, 2001) intends to increase the participation rate in HE to meet the changing human resource and labour needs. Breier (2001: 2) asks the question 'what kind of curriculum could prepare students for participation in a global economy'?

The reconstruction of the education system was underpinned by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA, 1998) Act No. 58 of 1995 and the Higher Education Act, Act No. 101 of 1997 (Ministry of Education, 2006). The need for a single qualifications framework for a single co-ordinated HE sector was highlighted in the Education White Paper 2 of 1997 and the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) (Ministry of Education, 2006), culminating in the integration of all HE qualifications into the NQF. The NQF and SAQA govern the educational standards together with the South African education system (Van Dyk, Nel, Loedolff & Haasbroek, 2001).

The NQF promoted Outcomes Based Education (OBE) which was influenced by the European, Australasian and North American qualifications frameworks. The SAQA Act No. 58 of 1995 and the establishment of SAQA aimed to facilitate access, mobility, and progression, integrate the education and training systems, accelerate redress and contribute to the development of learners and to the social and economic development of the country (SAQA, 2000). The purpose of OBE was to provide adequate and equal education opportunities for all South Africans and to empower individuals to participate in the development of the country. The NQF provides a ten-level framework with Level 1 accommodating Adult Basic Education and Training certification levels and the General Education and Training Certificate. Levels 2- 4 accommodate the Further Education and Training levels and Level 5 -10 accommodates the Higher Education and Training qualifications (SAQA, 2000).

The NQF requirements and the focus on learning outcomes has led to HE institutions aligning their curricula, programmes and courses with the requirements of OBE (Erasmus & Van Dyk, 2003: 14). In accordance with the National Plan for HE (Ministry of Education, 2001) the assumption is that the primary focus of the UT will be the cultivation of applied knowledge and job-related skills driven by

market forces and entrepreneurialism (Imenda, 2005). Economic and social change influence educational reform (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002) and HE in response to these changes is in a process of developing strategies around inclusiveness and responsiveness to social needs (Odora Hoppers, 2002).

Thus, there is still much work to be done regarding the development of relevant curricula and collaborative research programmes to meet the challenges of the dynamic workplace. According to Breier (2001) the need for a unified system at the HE level in South Africa, overshadowed the demands for curriculum reforms in HE in South Africa. Du Pré (2004) sees the role of UTs as delivering qualified graduates to the labour market and providing relevant HE in terms of what society and the modern world of work expect. The need for HE to provide courses which better reflect the integrated knowledge and qualities required in the new, competitive workplaces (Gibbons, 1998), calls for close collaboration between UTs, the workplace and society (Stromquist & Monkman, 2000).

#### **1.4 Background: Office Management and Technology in South Africa**

The National Diploma: Office Management and Technology (ND: OMT) was previously offered as various qualifications, such as: Executive Secretary, Legal Secretary, Medical Secretary, and others and usually in the Department of Secretarial Studies at the former Technikons in South Africa. At present the course is offered at the Central University of Technology (Free State), the Walter Sisulu University in the Eastern Cape, the Tshwane University of Technology in Pretoria and the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in Cape Town (CPUT). The Central University of Technology (Free State) has delivery sites in Bloemfontein and the university also has regional learning centres in Welkom to cater for students in the Goldfields area, and in Kimberley in the Northern Cape. The Walter Sisulu University has delivery sites in Buffalo City, Butterworth, Mthatha, Queenstown and a delivery site in Bhisho, the capital of the Eastern Cape Province. The Tshwane University of Technology has delivery sites in Pretoria, Polokwani and eMalahleni. The Cape Peninsula University of Technology has sites at Cape Town, Bellville and Wellington.

UTs constitute a dynamic HE system for South Africa as they specialise in making knowledge useful and contributing to 'greater technology transfer and international competitiveness' (Du Prè, 2004: 11). UT programmes have had a strong heritage in the provision of career-oriented education; they focus on the workplace as both a learning resource and a site of knowledge production. The strength of UT programmes is that students are simultaneously acculturated into academic, as well as workplace, knowledge systems. However, while UT programmes have acknowledged the role of the workplace, very little research has been done on work-based learning, or on the impact of career-focussed programmes (Engel-Hills, Garraway, Nduna, Philotheou & Winberg, 2005).

#### 1.4.1 The local context of the research

The qualification underwent several name changes over the years and has been referred to as the National Diploma in Secretarial Studies, National Diploma: Office Administration, National Diploma: Business Administration and National Diploma: Commercial Administration. In the early 1990s the course was offered initially as Business Administration and then as Commercial Administration in the Faculty of Business Informatics. In 1999 the name was changed to National Diploma: Office Management and Technology. OMT departments are usually situated in Faculties of Business together with the Accounting and Internal Auditing departments. This name reflects the course of study which includes the middle management level of any office, human resources, legal, financial, information technology theoretical and practical and communication functions and skills (Du Toit, 2008).

The ND: OMT is now offered at several UT campuses on a full-time and part-time basis. On some campuses students would predominantly be speakers of indigenous African languages, on others Afrikaans-speaking, and others, English-speaking. The medium of instruction on most campuses is English. There are currently bachelor-level studies in OMT available to students in the BTech: OMT programme, which is offered on a full time and part time basis at some campuses. The subject matter of the ND: OMT has always been multidisciplinary which has accounted for its strength and adaptability in the changing workplace (Du Toit, 2008). The ND: OMT includes studies in the fields of business administration, information administration, communication, legal practice, personnel management, mercantile law and financial accounting.

In response to the changing workplace most OMT departments have designed new vision and mission statements, for example:

The National Diploma and BTech qualifications in Office Management and Technology aim at providing the global business world with multi-skilled professionals. The mission of the OMT Department is to empower students and staff through innovative teaching, learning and research in partnership with the community and industry. The OMT Department aims to provide the local and international corporate sector with graduates who are skilled in administration, management and technology (Du Toit, 2008).

#### *Admission requirements*

The admission requirement for the ND: OMT is a Senior Certificate with five subjects, two of which must be languages on higher grade (HG) of which one must be English. The symbol achieved must be 'D' or higher and three other subjects must have been passed on standard or higher grade. The overall Senior Certificate requirement is 950 or higher.

#### 1.4.2 The communication courses

The communication courses of the OMT programme comprise communication theory and business writing practices. The models of communication provide the background and the theoretical framework for understanding communication practices in OMT. The National Diploma: OMT programme is a three-year course and students are required to study Business Administration, Information Administration (which comprises computer theory and practice), Communication, Legal Practice, Personnel Management, Mercantile Law and Financial Accounting. Students are also required to undertake six months of experiential training or work-integrated learning in the workplace.

The communication courses emphasise the practical skills required in business writing which would enable graduates to become effective office managers. The rules of the communication curricula require that students be active participants during the lectures and in the learning process. In order to ensure that students derive maximum benefit from their classes, they are expected to do reading, preparation and research for class discussion, and to complete assignments on each section of the work covered. The specified purpose of the Communication 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year curricula for OMT students is to enable students to apply communication skills effectively to a variety of communication activities and contexts within the office environment. While there are a variety of learning outcomes for the communication courses, for the purpose of this research, only those which apply to business writing skills for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year Communication students will be taken into account. The Communication 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year curricula include the critical cross field outcomes for OBE. Tables 1.1 and 1.2 refer to the learning and specific outcomes for business writing skills for the Communication 1 and 11 courses.

<u>LEARNING OUTCOMES</u>	<u>SPECIFIC OUTCOMES</u>
2. Use the different written forms of workplace communication effectively.	Write a variety of letters and concise correspondence to suit particular situations. 2.1 Write effective reports 2.2 Compile the documents needed for meetings Compose short prose texts
4. Collect, select and use a range of field-related texts.	4.1 Analyse a task 4.2 Collect information from various sources, e.g. library and the Internet 4.3 Use appropriate reading skills 4.4 Select, summarise and structure information in accordance with a required task 4.5 Correctly cite/reference sources of information

**Table 1.1: Learning outcomes for Communication 1 (Scholtz, 2007a: 6)**

<b><u>LEARNING OUTCOMES</u></b>	<b><u>SPECIFIC OUTCOMES</u></b>
2. Use the different written forms of workplace communication effectively.	2.1 Write a variety of letters and memoranda to suit particular situations 2.2 Compile a comprehensive CV 2.3 Write effective reports 2.4 Compile the documents needed for meetings 2.5 Compile portfolios
4. Collect, select and use a range of field-related texts.	4.1 Analyse a task 4.2 Collect information from various sources 4.3 Use appropriate reading skills 4.4 Select, summarise and structure information in accordance with a required task 4.5 Correctly cite/reference sources of information

**Table 1.2: Learning outcomes for Communication 11 (Scholtz, 2007b: 5)**

Tables 1.1 and 1.2 provide the details of the learning outcomes for business writing for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students. The specific outcomes provide the details of the business writing genres in which students are required to become competent in preparation for their entry to the workplace. While the learning outcomes for Communication 1 and 11 are similar, the unit standards for Communication 11 involve more advanced business writing skills, a greater complexity of knowledge and understanding and include more demanding cognitive skills such as the ability to transfer learning to new contexts. Students are expected to take more responsibility for their own learning, that is, become more independent, with concomitant reduction of support, supervision and guidance (SAQA, 2005). Communication 1 and 11 students are assessed according to the following competencies, namely, knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. However, a greater emphasis is placed on the assessment competencies of analysis, synthesis and evaluation for the Communication 11 course. While each subject of the OMT programme has its own curricula, integrated assignments, such as the event management assignment for 2<sup>nd</sup> year Communication students (refer to Figure 4.4), attempt to integrate business writing, information administration (computer) and business administration skills.

#### *Academic Support*

Academic support is provided by means of tutorials and the focus is on improving business writing skills. On many campuses the students have access to the tutors of a Writing Centre who provide assistance with note-taking, summary writing and assignment writing skills. Individual assistance is usually also provided to students who require additional support for academic and business writing skills.

### 1.4.3 Business writing and work-integrated learning

The OMT programme is intended to equip students for their future workplaces. The significance of workplace learning has received attention from HE in South Africa and internationally. Work-integrated learning or experiential learning is a strategy utilised by the former technikons and by UTs to apply learning. This is learning integrated with work and involves a structured programme combining relevant work experience with academic study. In the U.S. the engineering schools of Stanford University have calculated the emergence of more than 1500 companies from the work of staff and students (Du Pré, 2004). The UK Dearing Report (1997) promotes the establishment of technology incubator units within or close to HE institutions to support staff and students with regard to fostering business ideas developed in the institution.

Experiential learning is a valuable tool for providing novice employees with exposure to the world of work as well as providing them with the opportunities to practise their business writing skills and to receive mentorship from the employers. It is undertaken during the third year of study for a period of 6 months after students have completed the second year of the OMT programme. Novice employees are employed in a wide variety of fields including advertising, tourism, medical, insurance, legal, as well as in the general business areas. Co-operative Education academics are responsible for this component of the OMT programme and consult with the lecturing staff regarding the novice employees' progress. Business writing learned at education sites is consolidated by first-hand exposure and experience (Lauerman, 1989). The tradition of entering apprenticeships is an effective training method for learning writing skills as it combines both observation and action with learning from a mentor (Kellogg, 2008).

## **1.5 Introduction to the thesis structure**

This is a brief overview of the structure of the thesis.

### Chapter Two

In this section an overview is provided of the key issues and debates in the theoretical and research-based literature on language and learning, knowledge production and workplace learning, the models of communication and also a theoretical framework for understanding written communication practices in office management and technology.

### Chapter Three

In this section the research design, methodology and methods of research are discussed. The research design can be described as a comparative study which used both quantitative and qualitative methods and collected and produced documentary data, surveys, observations and interviews at both HE education and workplace sites.

#### Chapter Four

The findings from the curriculum data, assessment tasks and moderators' reports, a survey distributed to 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year OMT students at three campuses in the Western Cape, interviews conducted with three communication academics and observations conducted at HE sites, are presented in this section.

#### Chapter Five

The findings of documentary data, observations conducted at six sites in the workplace and interviews conducted with six employers and six novice employees, are presented in this section.

#### Chapter Six

In the final chapter a comparative summary of written communication in HE and the workplace is presented together with recommendations relating to the adequate preparation of OMT students for the world of work.

In the next chapter, the literature review is discussed and a theoretical framework for the study is developed.

## **CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON BUSINESS WRITING IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE WORKPLACE**

The act of writing is best described as the act of juggling a number of simultaneous constraints. This is in contrast to seeing it as a series of discrete stages or steps that add up to a finished product (Flowers & Hayes, 1980: 33).

### **2.1 Introduction**

A new challenge has emerged for academics involved with vocational and business education. The academic must question the educational practices which are used to support the construction of working knowledge which is unstable and constantly changing. The academic needs to question the place of knowledge disciplines in the formation of a skilled workforce in new economic times (Chappell, 2000). These changes apply equally to communication education in career-focused education (Dias, Freedman, Medway & Paré, 1999).

This section provides an overview of recent research on language and learning in career-focused HE, knowledge production and workplace learning, the models of communication and develops a theoretical framework for understanding communication practices in HE and workplace-based business writing.

### **2.2 Language and learning**

One of the central processes through which students in HE learn new subjects is the process of academic literacy. Opinions are often expressed that students in HE can no longer produce academic writing and that there is a lowering of the standards of student literacy (Lea & Street, 1998; Prinsloo, 2000). The understanding of literacy as a core basic skill required to develop 'higher order skills' and 'trainability' still dominates policy-making in many countries (Prinsloo, 2000: 109). In HE in the U.S, a common curricular denominator was the general composition course, usually housed in English departments, to prepare students for academic and workplace writing (Russell, 1997). Prinsloo (2000) refers to 'The New Literacy Studies' (NLS) in the UK as well as the extensive efforts being made in South Africa and Australia in setting up a system of outcomes-based, assessment driven education and provision.

The social and ideological orientation of the NLS recognises the 'academic literacies' approach which takes the view that students switch linguistic practices from one setting to what is appropriate in another. In support of this approach is the work in critical discourse analysis, systemic functional linguistics and cultural anthropology which view student writing as involving the processes of meaning-making (Lea & Street, 1998). Texts in workplace environments are action-oriented

(Bazerman, 1994a) and dynamic (Bazerman & Paradis, 1991), in contrast to academic writing which is more theoretical and reflective. In the different contexts writing can be seen as socially constructed as it organises our perceptions and it structures our relations with others. By studying texts within their contexts, and particularly within professions, an understanding is gained of how the professions establish themselves and carry out their work through texts.

The significance for this thesis of the literature surveyed above, has to do with how students switch practices between one setting and another. When students enter the workplace they need to switch from academic writing, which is more theoretical and reflective, to texts which are dynamic and goal-oriented.

### 2.2.1 Studies in writing and the workplace

In modern societies, writing and communication are powerful and pervasive (Russell, 1997). 'Communication' is a term often used to describe activities in which people interact, from face-to-face conversations to writing letters or sending e-mails via the internet. In the workplace, the main focus of these communications, whether local or global, interpersonal or electronic, is 'the job-related message' (Grant & Borchers, 2002: 5). 'Technical writing' can be defined as writing done for, or in preparation for, some professional purposes and can include various forms of professional writing, for example, progress reports, scientific articles, minutes of meetings, funding proposals and so on (Winberg, Lehman, Van der Geest & Nduna, 2005).

University-level technical and business communications courses have been offered in HE nationally and internationally with the objective of improving students' writing skills to prepare them for both academic and workplace writing (Russell, 1997). In 1902 the first course in business writing was taught at the University of Illinois as it was felt that future business leaders required training in effective writing. Similar courses developed at other colleges and were practical in nature emphasising style and form of business documentation. The field of business writing has always been multidisciplinary and included theoretical underpinnings from the fields of psychology, sociology, management, rhetoric, information theory and linguistics. The basic business writing course was designed for those who will be writing in their roles as office managers, accountants, social workers and so on (Kogen, 1989).

Bazerman (1980) was one of the first researchers to undertake cultural-historical research into technical writing. He looked at the way scientists write and began asking how communications were organised in disciplines and how writing practices (and genres) were regularised in various fields for different purposes (Bazerman, 1988). Influenced by this research, ethnographic methods were applied to improve the teaching of writing by studying how writing mediates the actions of workplace

professionals. One of the writing research methods was based on the analytical category of genre that is different to the notions of literary genre. It studies the recurring social actions that lead to regularities in the discourse that brings them about (Russell, 1997).

Bazerman's research was extended by a number of researchers. To name a few, Yates (1989) undertook research in modern organisational communication, Myers (1990) in biology research, MacDonald (1994) in humanities and social sciences, McCarthy (1991) on psychiatry, Yates and Orlikowski (1994) on contemporary management communication theory, Van Nostrand (1994) in the U.S. Department of Defense and Haas (1996) who used activity theory (AT) to investigate writing and computer technology as a material cultural tool.

According to Bazerman and Russell (2003), AT approaches to understanding writing provide the means to examine how people do the work of the world and the meanings they form that give rise to the sense of selves and societies through writing, reading and circulating texts. AT relies on an interdisciplinary perspective that views performance as formed by, and responsive to, social, historical, cultural and linguistic resources, conditions and processes. In this way, AT provides the structure for the study of language, its production, its textual manifestations, and utilisation within organised social settings (Bazerman & Prior, 2004). The benefits of activity research on writing have been felt in fields such as the design of electronic tools (Spinuzzi, 2000; Spinuzzi & Zachry, 2000) and on education where it has helped students to learn through writing (Bazerman, 1980; Bazerman & Russell, 2003) and in medical research and practice (Berkenkotter & Ravotas, 1998), to name but a few examples.

The AT approach is relevant to this comparative study of business writing in HE and the workplace as it emphasises the social context in which writing occurs. Business writing as a means of communication in HE and the workplace are social activities which rely upon the production of language. The AT approach recognises that language pervasively brings about other human activities (Bazerman, 1994a) and plays an important role in profession-building (Bazerman & Paradis, 1991). Writing technologies enable humans to communicate worldwide and modern economies are constantly changing genres and media so that 'knowledge work' is almost always 'paperwork' (Bazerman & Russel, 2003: 2).

### 2.2.2 Writing and genre in HE and workplaces

Russell (1997) has researched the roles which writing plays in various activities and more particularly in those activities in which writing mediates work. He researches writing in academic disciplines, professions and other organisations of modern life. He defines 'genre' as an important analytical category which is defined in terms of 'typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent social situations'

(Russell, 1997: 224) and as the expectations which are shared among some groups of people and not merely texts that share some common features. Genres are viewed as environments for learning and teaching and structures for social relations (Bazerman, 1994b).

According to Yates and Orlikowski genre systems are 'sequences of interrelated communicative actions and are important means of structuring collaborative work both tacitly as habitual mechanisms and explicitly as deliberate devices' (2002: 14). However, whether used implicitly or explicitly, genres are a powerful source of communicative norms for social activity. In some cases, genres are linked or networked together in a way that constitutes a more co-ordinated communication process. An example of this is where 'committee meetings often include a series of genres such as, oral presentations, dialogue and voting' (2002: 15).

According to Miller (1994) textual genres are 'social actions' and language practices are considered as 'situated activities'. Versions of AT expand on this theory and view language as a 'tool' within an activity system (Bazerman & Paradis, 1991; Berkenkotter & Ravotas, 1997; Russell 1997). The types of writing produced in the workplace rely upon the 'lesser' genres such as e-mail memoranda in the production of 'major genres' such as workplace reports (Winberg, 2007). Spinuzzi and Zachry (2000) refer to this concept as 'genre ecology' and Yates and Orlikowshi (2002) describe this process as a range of texts which are drawn on in the production of a new text connecting each text to the previous text in a sequential chain of 'textual pathways'. In the HE context students are generally required to produce business writing without base documents, such as memoranda in the production of a report, and would be expected to create them from scratch (Winberg, 2007). The view of language as a 'tool' within an activity system is significant to this comparative study of the HE and workplace activity systems. The study of the types of writing produced, the genres upon which they rely and the process of the production of writing in each context, is necessary to identify the potential differences which exist in writing practices across different sites and contexts.

### **2.3 Knowledge production and workplace learning**

The idea of linking learning to work is not a new one as its philosophical roots can be traced to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Locke and John Dewey (Boud & Solomon, 2001). The influences of globalisation, democratisation and the information technological revolution on society can be seen in the movement away from an industrial model into a knowledge worker economy. The impact of these influences on HE practice and policy internationally (Gibbons, 1998; Stomquist & Monkman, 2000) and in South Africa (Kraak, 2000; Cloete & Maasen, 2002; Boughey, 2002) has been in the movement away from traditional disciplinary boundaries of 'Mode 1' knowledge production, to new or 'Mode 2' knowledge production (Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzmann, Scott & Trow, 1994).

Mode 2 knowledge production is created in transdisciplinary, economic and social contexts and in meeting the needs of developing economies. It has been seen to be linked to a communicative basis for knowledge (Heath, 2001), an 'I' perspective (McNiff, 2005) and to 'intraspective observation' (Mason, 2002: 65) resulting in a collaborative approach to educational research and aims to produce knowledge as a source of action and basis for further enquiries (Brulin, 2001; Mason, 2002; Gerber, 2005).

UTs can meet the demands of Mode 2 knowledge production by directing the teaching and research programmes towards meeting the needs of society and towards identifying new possibilities for knowledge production. They must maintain close contact with the business sector, ensure relevant curricula and serve as learning laboratories for on-site education and for research enriched by industrial and business experience. The emphasis of UTs would be on delivering graduates ready for the workplaces of the future (Du Pré, 2004). The literature surveyed above is relevant to this thesis through its recommendations to HE to maintain close contact with the requirements of the business sector to ensure relevant curricula in order to meet the demands of Mode 2 knowledge production.

### 2.3.1 Knowledge transfer and learning in the workplace

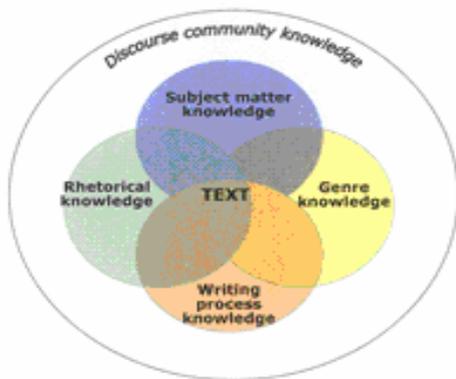
When students enter the workplace the knowledge they bring with them is changed so that it can be understood. Knowledge transfer describes knowledge movement across contexts. At an individual level it can be defined as 'how knowledge acquired in one situation applies or fails to apply at another situation' (Singley & Anderson, 1989: 42). One of the responsibilities of UTs is the generation of new knowledge through research. Du Pré (2004) believes that the greatest contribution of UTs will be in the transfer of new knowledge to the society through the translation of knowledge into artefacts, patents and objects useful in the uplifting of communities. He defines 'technology transfer' as the formal transfer of new discoveries, innovations and technology from research and development in HE to the commercial and industrial sectors in the economy. 'Technology interchange' refers to the two streams of technology transfer, namely, one from within the university and the other being the opportunities brought into the university for joint development and exploitation (2004: 29).

According to Engel-Hills, Garraway, Nduna, Philotheou & Winberg (2005) the transformation of knowledge from the workplace is de-contextualised and stylised for the purpose of re-contextualisation. The knowledge which students require to enter the workplace is transformed by workplace practitioners for delivery to the HE institution. The HE institution re-contextualises this knowledge combining the constraints of educational policy, teaching methods, curricula and so on. Finally, the graduate armed with this knowledge enters the workplace. The question posed in the above study is whether the knowledge which graduates bring with them to the world of work is effective in the workplace, taking into account the various transformations of knowledge, particularly

between the world of work and that of HE. The literature above has direct bearing on this comparative study of business writing in HE and the workplace because it addresses the extent to which knowledge and business writing skills which students acquire in communication courses are effective when they enter the workplace.

### 2.3.2 Knowledge-based practices for writers

In a study of writers making the transition from school to the workplace, the findings show that writers need to draw upon five knowledge-domains when producing text. Figure 2.1 shows the knowledge-domains identified by Beaufort (1999: 64), namely, subject matter knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, discourse community knowledge, genre knowledge and writing process knowledge. Research carried out by Walters, Hunter & Giddens (2007) studied how graduates of a programme in business writing gained access to careers in business writing and expanded on Beaufort’s (1999) model of knowledge-domains. Figure 2.2 shows the adaptation of Beaufort’s model by adding metacognitive knowledge. The researchers found that writers discussed each of the knowledge-based practices or skills shown in Figure 2.2 and their ability to recognise and use these knowledge-based practices.



**Figure 2.1: Model of Knowledge Domains ( Beaufort, 1999: 64)**



**Figure 2.2: Adaptation of Beaufort’s Model (Pintrich, 2002)**

Table 2.1 provides the definitions of each knowledge-based practice which successful writers utilise when presented with a writing project.

**Table 2.1: Successful writers' knowledge-based practices (Adaptation of Walters, Hunter & Giddens, 2007)**

Knowledge-based practices	Knowledge-based practices defined
Subject matter knowledge	Information and/or understanding about the topic for a piece of writing
Genre knowledge	Understanding of the conventions of a particular kind of written text
Writing process knowledge	Information and/or understanding about how writers compose or produce a given text by planning, researching, drafting, and revising
Rhetorical knowledge	Information and/or understanding about the purpose(s) of a text, the claims and evidence that may be included in a text, the audience who will read a text, and the situation informing both the readers' and writer's views of the issues related to a text
Discourse community knowledge	Understanding the various expectations and needs of writers and readers who take part in discussions about a subject
Metacognitive knowledge	Self-awareness of methods of approaching writing tasks and the ability to articulate and assess personal strengths and weaknesses related to these methods

For writers to be successful in the workplace they need to utilise the six knowledge-based practices as identified in Figure 2.2. The addition of the metacognitive knowledge-based practice as an outer layer indicates that self-reflection about all of the knowledge areas of expertise is characteristic of successful writers. Successful writers define success as mastering these six knowledge-based practices and gaining a response from the receivers or audience of the writing (Walters, Hunter & Giddens, 2007). Students need to acquire these knowledge-based practices in order to be proficient in business writing. This is of relevance to the comparative study of business writing in HE and the workplace, particularly with regard to the identification of potential gaps in the communication curricula.

### 2.3.3 Cognitive demands of writing

Kellogg (2006) attempted to define expertise in writing by studying the common elements of business writing expertise. His study draws attention to the cognitive demands of writing and the cognitive model of writing by Hayes and Flower (1980).

The first cognitive models of writing viewed writing as complex problem-solving. According to the cognitive model of writing (Hayes & Flower, 1980) there are three general classes of writing operation, namely, planning, translating and reviewing. Planning comprises generating ideas, organising them and setting goals to be achieved in the structure of the text. Translating is described as retrieving information from memory and translating it into sentences and paragraphs to produce the draft of a text which the writer intends to be read and understood by the audience. According to Kellogg (2006) several linguistic processes take place during this operation. These are mainly unconscious and include: selecting words, generating cohesive links among sentences, and

establishing coherence in the text. Reviewing the text includes editing and re-reading in order to detect faults at multiple levels of text structure.

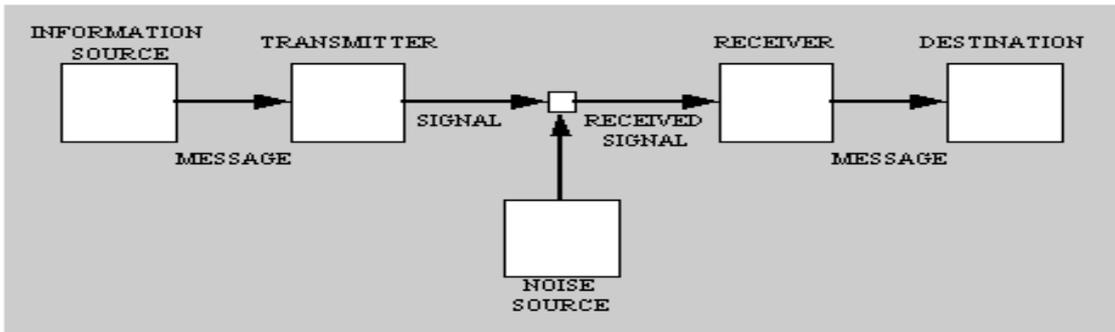
Hayes and Flowers (1980) also identified problem-solving and working memory as skills which aspiring writers need in order to become proficient business writers. The production of text can place demands on working memory, because it requires maintaining numerous mental representations during the planning, translating and reviewing processes. These processes occur in complex patterns through pre-writing, first draft and revision phases in text production (Kellogg, 2006).

Writing expertise depends on mastering the cognitive demands of planning, translating and reviewing, problem-solving skills of knowing what to say and how to say it, pre-writing, drafting and revising strategies to manage the cognitive load, awareness of the audience, the use of appropriate language, and the rhetorical style required in a specific domain (Kellogg, 2006). This approach is relevant to this research as the acquisition of expertise in writing is made up of complex processes which do not occur in a linear sequence. Writing is a dynamic process which requires deliberate practice to reach professional levels of achievement (Kellogg, 2006).

#### **2.4 Communication models**

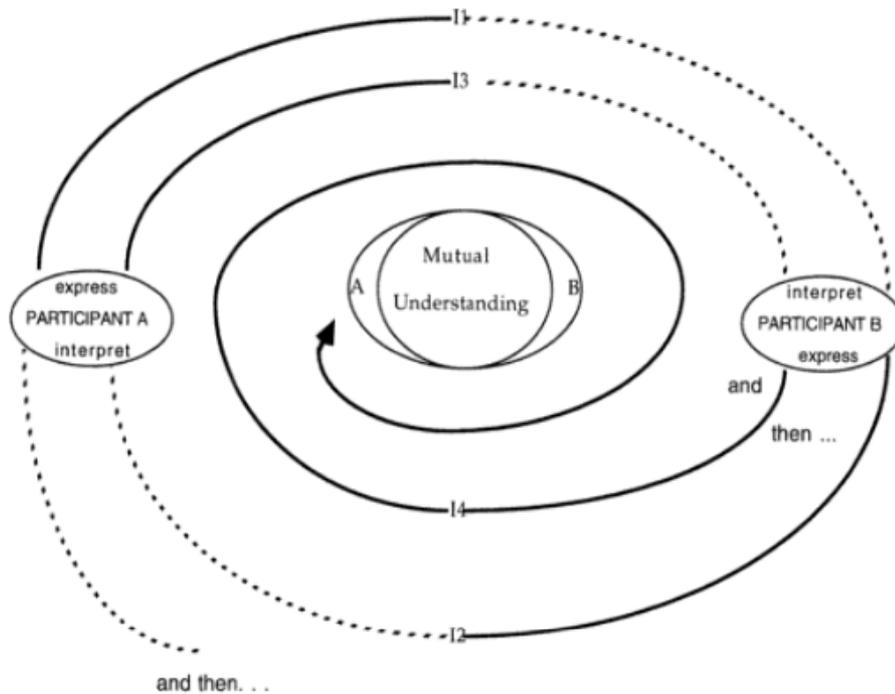
Numerous models of communication exist as communication has been the 'subject of study for centuries' (Grant & Borchers, 2002: 8) and a few examples are: the Aristotelian model (Mortensen, 1972) which concentrated on the rhetorical power of persuasion and the influence of the speaker, Shannon's linear model of communication (1948) which compartmentalised communication into units, and Kincaid's convergence model of communication (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981) which demonstrated the more open-ended process approaches to communication. While there are more recent models of communication which are similar in nature, Shannon's linear model (1948) and Kincaid's convergence model of communication (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981) will be drawn upon to demonstrate the elements of the communication process.

Shannon's linear model (1948) identifies the elements of interpersonal communication as it provides a breakdown of the elements of the communication process. It is considered to be a classic model of the communication process and is used in most communication textbooks to demonstrate the elements of the communication process. The limitations of this model are that the speaker has a higher status role than the listener, little attention is given to context, the primary function is directional persuasion and the communication can tend towards the control of responses or reactions (Grant & Borchers, 2002). Figure 2.3 is an example of Shannon's (1948) Model of the communication process.



**Figure 2.3: Shannon's (1948) Model of the communication process**

Later models of communication, for example, Kincaid's convergence model of communication (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981) attempted to capture the more dynamic open-ended approaches to communication. This model attempts to show the communication exchange of the two-way communication process. It is preferable when considering multi-cultural business negotiations as it attempts to show the process of communication converging towards a common interest (Grant & Borchers, 2002). Figure 2.4 is an example of Kincaid's convergence model of communication.

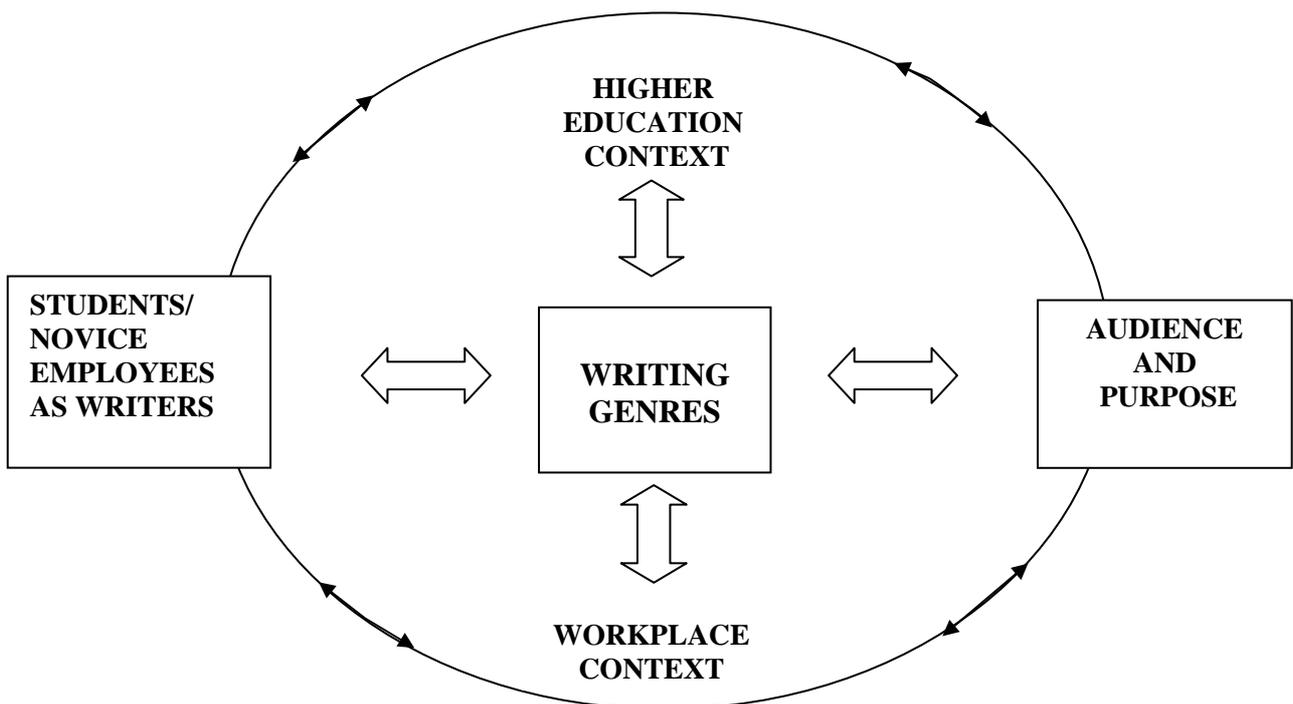


**Figure 2.4 Kincaid's convergence model of communication (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981)**

For the purpose of this research, the two models described above will provide the background for the development of a theoretical framework for understanding written communication practices in HE and the workplace.

## 2.5 A theoretical framework for understanding written communication practices in office management and technology

Communication is a dynamic process and the main elements are: the sender of the message, the message, the receiver of the message and the context in which the communication takes place. The communication originates with the sender who sends a message which is verbal, that is, oral or written, or non-verbal. In this research students and novice employees are the senders or writers of the message. The way in which the message is sent is by means of a wide range of channels, such as telephone, facsimile, letter, e-mail, radio, pictures and so on. For the purpose of this research, the focus is on writing genres as the channels for the message, which carries a meaning to the person or persons who will be the receiver or audience of the message. The process is dynamic as there is feedback from the receivers or audience of the messages. The communication process is also influenced by the context within which it takes place. In this research HE and the workplace are contexts in which the communication process takes place. The focus of research is the writing practices in HE and the workplace. A theoretical model of written communication, comprising the elements of the communication writing process, is presented in Figure 2.5.



**Figure 2.5: Theoretical model of written communication in HE and workplaces**

This model serves to identify the dynamic process of business writing in HE and the workplace. It identifies the elements of the written communication process which serve as categories of investigation. Shannon's linear model (1948) was drawn upon to provide the elements of the written communication process in HE and the workplace. Taking into account the discussion of the limitations of attempting to demonstrate communication as a linear process, Kincaid's convergence model of

communication (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981) was drawn upon to demonstrate the dynamic process and the cyclical, open-ended communication process of written communication in HE and the workplace.

The findings from the research undertaken in HE and the workplace were analysed in accordance with the elements of this theoretical model of written communication, namely, the different contexts, the students and novice employees as writers, the writing genres, the audience and purpose of writing. This theoretical model provides the framework for the analysis and synthesis of the findings. The elements identified in the model serve as categories for investigation into the business writing practices of the HE programmes and the workplace.

## **2.6 Summary of the main points in the literature**

The issues that are mentioned in the literature review have focussed on the aspects relevant to this comparative study of business writing processes in HE and the workplace. Language and learning, knowledge production and workplace learning and the communication models provide a broader framework for this research.

In the HE context, students learn new subjects in the process of academic literacy. Academic writing is unique to the HE context. In the workplace context learning and writing are dynamic, action-oriented and goal driven. It is important to this research to study how language brings about human activities and enables humans to communicate. The human activities of producing texts enables communication world-wide. The production of texts performs an important function and influences a wide range of social actions in HE and the workplace.

Modern economies are constantly changing genres and media. Genres provide communication norms for social activity both in HE and the workplace. The study of the types of writing produced in HE and the workplace and the genres upon which they rely, are essential to this research. The focus of HE is knowledge production which needs to meet the demands of society. Mode 2 knowledge production demands that HE deliver graduates ready for present and future workplaces. Workplace learning has become a necessary component of HE programmes in order to better equip students to enter the workplace. It provides direction for HE programmes while allowing for the identification of new possibilities for knowledge production which would benefit both student learning and workplaces.

The issue of knowledge transfer from HE to the workplace demands attention to the pedagogy of business writing. The various transformations of knowledge between the workplace and HE are relevant to the study of whether there are gaps in the communication curricula which prevent effective knowledge transfer. For students to be effective writers in the workplace they must acquire the knowledge-based practices of subject matter knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, discourse community knowledge, genre knowledge, writing process knowledge and metacognitive knowledge. Complex

problem-solving, planning and review of writing are the cognitive demands of writing which students need to master to be effective in the workplace. It is the role of HE to provide opportunities for students to practise these skills. However, there is still much work to be done regarding the development of relevant curricula to meet the challenges of the dynamic workplace.

The communication models provide the background for the development of a theoretical model of written communication in HE and the workplace. The elements identified in the model serve as categories for investigation into the business writing practices of the HE programmes and the workplace and provide the framework for the analysis and synthesis of the findings.

In the next chapter, the research methodology comprising both quantitative and qualitative methods is discussed.

## CHAPTER 3: A RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR STUDYING COMMUNICATION PRACTICE IN OFFICE MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

Comparative studies were defined as those in which the influence of larger systems upon the characteristics of units within them is examined at some stage of analysis. Consequently comparative studies involve at least two levels of analysis (Przeworski & Teune, 1970: 74).

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with an explanation of the research design, followed by a discussion of the site and participation selection procedures. The data collection and production at the HE and workplace sites, as well as the methods for the capture and analysis of data from these sites, are also discussed.

### 3.2 Research Design

The research design takes the form of a comparative study that was conducted at HE and workplace sites. Data were collected at two different sites, namely, HE and the workplace. The data were then compared with a view to understanding relationships and enhancing their alignment. Table 3.1 is a summary of the comparative research at HE sites and the workplace.

**Table 3.1: Summary of comparative research at higher education sites and workplaces**

Higher Education Sites	Workplaces
Documentary data	Documentary data
Student surveys	Interviews with novice employees in the workplace
Observations of students' writing in classrooms	Observations of novice employees' writings in workplaces
Interviews with academics	Interviews with employers

The benefits of comparative research are: it helps develop better methods and techniques, it contributes to, and provides insights into, new variables, relationships and causal patterns, and it tends to provide a wide range of variation on independent variables that aid analysis of possible causal factors and internal validity. In addition, the generality of relationships observed in a single research site can be ascertained to establish external validity (Roos, 1974; Warwick & Osherson, 1973; Przeworski & Teune, 1970).

After being ignored for many years, comparative approaches in research are regaining their popularity. They are viewed both as a method of inquiry and as a frame of analysis. The growing influence of comparative research is linked to a global climate of a flux of communication, interdependent networks, economic competition and a need to create international tools and comparative indicators to 'measure the efficiency and quality of education' (Nòvoa & Yariv-Mashal, 2003: 425).

According to Nòvoa and Yariv-Mashal the enthusiasm towards comparative approaches in research has two major consequences, namely, that by using comparable measures and benchmarks, the researcher is creating an ‘international spectacle’ which deeply influences the formation and conceptions of new policies of education and, secondly, the researcher is creating a sense of mutual accountability (2003: 427).

The major problems of comparative inquiry, according to Przeworski and Teune (1970: 13) ‘are to introduce systemic factors into general, theoretical statements and to retain the systemic context of measurement statements’. The complexities of the comparative approaches in research are in the challenges which imply a new understanding of problems in the educational field. The researcher may highlight differences and similarities, but the challenge is to go beyond the facts or realities to the educational problems which constitute the basis for complex comparisons (Nòvoa & Yariv-Mashal, 2003). Schriever (2006: 307) suggests that the ‘bridging problems’ between evidence-borne documentation and theory-related analyses of a virtually global data and information base raised by the comparative approach, require solutions methodologically, theoretically and philosophically within individual disciplines.

### 3.2.1 Data collection and production in the comparative study

Data were collected from workplaces and three HE sites where the OMT programme is run. Data collection may be described as the collection of data in natural settings, which is distinguished from data production which is ‘artificially’ produced data, such as interviews (Atkinson & Coffey, 2002). A triangulation of methodology was used which may be described as an epistemological merger between quantitative and qualitative approaches and a ‘synthesis of sorts’ (Jones & LeBaron, 2002: 505). This offers the potential for greater variety of information and thoroughness. This comparative study made use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Four methods of data collection, namely, surveys, documentary data, observations and interviews were used in order to ensure triangulation of data-gathering. Triangulation is ‘the process by which a social phenomenon is observed and measured by various techniques’ (Carranza, 1982: 81). As more valid and reliable findings are likely to be produced by means of collecting data through various techniques than by collecting data from only one source, this comparative study collected and produced data from multiple sources.

### **3.3 Site and participant selection**

The research was done at both HE and workplace sites. The research was limited to UTs and workplaces in the Western Cape. The predominant language groups of the Western Cape identified by province census of 2001 (SouthAfrica.info, n.d.), are Afrikaans, English and Xhosa, but many other

provinces of South Africa are considered to be multilingual. In the section below, the selection processes and criteria are described.

### 3.3.1 HE sites

Three HE sites were selected. The selection criteria included: 1) sites where the OMT programme was offered, 2) sites that included students who use different South African first languages (e.g., Zulu, Xhosa, English and Afrikaans), 3) sites that include experiential training in commercial workplaces and 4) sites that gave permission for observations to occur and for surveys to be distributed and interviews to be conducted.

### 3.3.2 Participant selection

All 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year OMT students at the three HE sites were included in the survey (refer to section 3.4.1) and all three full time academic staff members who lecture Communication 1 and 11 were interviewed. Surveys were conducted with 371 students at three campuses of the CPUT. Students were asked to voluntarily complete the surveys and were allowed to ask questions of clarification. 265 students responded to the surveys.

### 3.3.3 Workplace sites

Novice employees are employed in a wide variety of fields and at small, medium and large companies. Purposive sampling of the employers was undertaken. The limitation of purposive sampling is that it does not cover a wide cross section of the participants. The advantage of this method is that in-depth information is obtained from an interested group of participants. The sites selected were limited to those companies that granted permission for the research.

The Co-operative Education academic provided the researcher with the contact details of small, medium and large companies that employ the 3<sup>rd</sup> year OMT students for the six months experiential training component of the ND: OMT. As advised by the Co-operative Education academic, those organisations with track records of dedication and support of the novice employees and the experiential learning programme were selected. Two large companies, two medium-sized companies and two small companies were selected from the list of employers for observations, interviews and the collection of documentation. This provided an opportunity to view the students applying the writing skills acquired during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years of the communication course.

### 3.3.4 Participant selection

Personal Skills Assessment forms (refer to Figure 3.1) were obtained from 68 employers of OMT students on experiential training during 2007. In addition, senior personnel of organisations who employ OMT novice employees, namely, the Settlement Manager of a large retail company and the Head of Library and Information Services of a large private company, the Senior Administration Officer Human Resources Development and the Director of two medium-sized companies, the Sales Director of a small private company and the Director of a small private training company were interviewed. Six students, as novice employees were interviewed.

<b>PERSONAL SKILLS ASSESSMENT FORM</b>		
<b>NAME &amp; SURNAME LEARNER :</b>		
<b>LEARNER NUMBER :</b>		
<b>EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING PERIOD :</b>		
<b>NAME &amp; SURNAME SUPERVISOR :</b>		
<b>NAME OF COMPANY :</b>		
<b>TEL. NO. :</b>	<b>FAX NO. :</b>	
<b>E-MAIL ADDRESS :</b>		
<b>Please note that an “outstanding” rating should only be awarded in cases where the learner really merits such a rating as a result of outstanding behaviour.</b>		
<b>PERSONAL SKILLS FIELD</b>	<b>FINAL MARK (%)</b>	<b>ASSESSMENT SCALE</b>
Verbal Communication : Use of language when communicating with others		Poor : 0 – 35%
Written Communication : Expression in the written word		
Human relations : Top management and peers		Below Average : 36 – 49%
Listening Skills : Listen to the opinions and ideas of other		
Assertiveness : Means relaying opinions across in a mature and determined Manner		Average : 50 – 54%
Degree of Interest in Work : Enthusiasm and eagerness to tackle new work		
Independent Work Procedure : Ability to work unsupervised		Above Average : 55 – 64%
Perseverance : When faced with difficulties in the execution of tasks		
Decision making in crisis situation		Good : 65 – 74%
Demonstrate Effective Time Management		
Organising of a Special Event (e.g. meeting, workshop, conference, etc.)		Very Good : 75 – 84%
Application of theoretical knowledge		
Can the learner collect, analyse and organise information		Outstanding : 85 – 100%
Has the learner the ability to solve problems		
Can the learner use technology effectively and responsibly		
Successful interpretation and completion of tasks		
General appearance and neatness : Adhering to appropriate dress code		
Attendance and punctuality : Work in terms of employment contract and adhering to required working times		
Adaptability to Work Environment		
<b>AVERAGE MARK</b>	<b>%</b>	
<b>TOTAL : A</b>		

**Figure 3.1: Personal Skills Assessment form**

### **3.4 Data collection and production: HE**

Data were collected from OMT students and the OMT communication academics at three campuses. In order to build a record of the business writing practices of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year OMT students, four types of data were collected:

- 1) A survey was designed and conducted with approximately 371 students at the Bellville, Wellington and Cape Town campuses which offer the OMT programme.
- 2) Documentary data at the HE sites, such as curricular documents, teaching and learning materials, assessment material, results of learned communication skills and examples of students' writing, were used for the purpose of clarification and triangulation.
- 3) Observational data were obtained by video-recording written communication practices during four double periods at the HE sites.
- 4) Interview data were obtained at the HE sites by using 'discourse-based interviews' with three communication academics. A 'discourse-based interview' is one that focuses on texts or documents used or produced by the interviewee (Odell, Goswami & Herrington, 1983).

#### 3.4.1 Surveys

Surveys (refer to Appendix A for the student survey questionnaire) were conducted with Communication 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students at the three campuses. A survey provides a tool for obtaining information which can be tabulated and discussed. It can help the researcher obtain information about what people do, what they have and what they think, know, feel or want (Taylor-Powell, 1998). The survey was designed in order to establish whether there are gaps with regard to the preparation of OMT students for the world of work. It was conducted with 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students at the Bellville, Wellington and Cape Town campuses which offer the OMT programme.

The questions developed for the survey aimed at investigating students' experiences of the Communication 1 and 11 courses and the teaching and learning practices within the OMT departments of UTs. The personal details and business writing experiences of students were covered under Sections A and B of the survey (refer to Appendix A).

Section C of the survey included a selection chart of the writing practices which students had experienced in the Communication 1 and 11 classrooms as well as questions regarding the students' business writing ability and their opinions of the Communication 1 and 11 courses. An attempt was made to intersperse the open-ended more difficult questions which required commentary so that these were not all left to the end. This method aims to prevent the respondents' loss of interest and superficial responses to the longer questions (Burgess, 2001).

### 3.4.2 Documentary data

Burgess makes a basic distinction between primary sources and secondary sources of documents, the former being described as ‘materials that are gathered first hand and have a direct relationship with the people, situations or events that are studied’ such as minutes of meetings, letters, reports and so on (1984:123).

The documentary data of the business writing practices of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year OMT students at the three campuses of CPUT were obtained by examination of curricular documents, teaching and learning materials, assessment material, results of assignments and tests and examples of students’ writing in the classrooms for the purpose of clarification and triangulation. This supported the thematic analysis obtained from observational and interview data.

### 3.4.3 Observational data

Four double periods of 45 minutes per period were selected for observations where students were being taught business writing skills and three communication academics were interviewed. An unobtrusive, direct observation in a natural environment allows for data to be collected by recognising and noting behaviour, objects and occurrences. Some of the limitations of this method are: it is very difficult to observe things such as attitudes, motivation and intentions, if people know they are being observed, they tend to behave differently, and it may be perceived by some people as an invasion of privacy (Struwig & Stead, 2001).

At Campus X both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year Communication students have five periods of 45 minutes per week. The 5<sup>th</sup> period is timetabled so that it is not seen by students as adjunct to their timetable, but as part of it. The 5<sup>th</sup> period is used for tutorials and additional practical classes where necessary. At Campuses Y and Z, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year Communication students are required to attend four periods of 45 minutes per period. Communication academics usually get allocated two double periods of 45 minutes per period per week as this provides opportunities for group and practical work. The 1<sup>st</sup> period of a double period usually deals with theoretical discussion of the course content and the 2<sup>nd</sup> period addresses the practical application of the theory. However, based on logistical and timetable constraints it is not always possible for an academic to be allocated a double period.

Four double periods were observed and video-recorded where students were being taught business writing skills and where students were involved in both individual and group activities. An observation schedule was developed to capture the data recorded during the observation periods. The details of the class, subject and academic were entered on the schedules. The videos were examined and the schedules completed taking into account the types and frequency of business writing practices

observed during the classes. Refer to Appendix B for the complete classroom observation schedule. Figure 3.2 is an example of questions 1 – 4 of the observation schedule.

		Most often	Often	Seldom	Not at all	Comments
1	Is there interaction between the academic and students?					
2	Does the academic make use of teaching aids: OHP/textbooks, etc?					
3	Does the academic demonstrate the business writing skill?					
4	Does the academic model workplace writing practices?					

**Figure 3.2: Questions 1 – 4 of the observation schedule**

#### 3.4.4 Interviews at the HE sites

Interviews were conducted with three academic staff members who teach the Communication 1 and 11 courses. Personal interviews are considered to be versatile, flexible and provide good response rates. Interviews can be adapted to the situation, and where required, further clarifications and explanations can be provided by both the interviewer and interviewee (Struwig & Stead, 2001). The semi-standardised interview comprises predetermined questions which are posed to the participant in a systematic and consistent manner, but the participant is allowed to discuss issues beyond the confines of the questions (Berg, 1995). It is therefore a combination of the structured and unstructured interview and enables the researcher to obtain multiple responses to set questions and allows for detailed responses (Struwig & Stead, 2001).

Semi-standardised interviews lasting approximately 45 minutes were conducted with three of the academics who hold permanent posts at the CPUT. The interview schedule comprised a section dealing with general questions requiring the interviewees to provide information on their home language, career and work experience. These were followed by the interview questions regarding the business writing practices of the OMT programme. Refer to Appendix C (Interview schedule for communication academics). Figure 3.3 shows an example of the interview questions 1 - 7 of the schedule.

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What academic writing skills do you teach the OMT students?</li> <li>2. What methods do you employ to teach academic writing skills?</li> <li>3. Do you model academic writing practices in the classroom? Please elaborate.</li> <li>4. Do you believe that students are given sufficient time/reinforcement in communication classes and also in the classes of other subjects within the programme to practise academic writing skills? Please elaborate.</li> <li>5. What business writing skills do you teach OMT students?</li> <li>6. What methods do you employ to teach business writing skills?</li> <li>7. Do you model business writing practices in the classroom? Please elaborate.</li> </ol> |
|--|

**Figure 3.3: Example of the interview questions for academics**

### **3.5 Data collection and production: Workplaces**

Data were obtained from interviews with employers of OMT students (novice employees) and with the novice employees themselves. Novice employees were observed in their workplaces. In addition, staff of the co-operative student placement programme for OMT students at the three campuses provided documentation relating to employers' assessments of the OMT students (novice employees), minutes of meetings attended by employers and so on.

In order to establish a record of the business writing practices of office managers in the workplace, four types of data were collected:

- 1) Data were collected from the workplace by means of an examination of the Personal Skills Assessment forms from employers regarding novice employees who had completed their experiential training during 2007, from the examples of business writing practices of the workplace and from documentation containing feedback from Advisory Committee meetings. These are meetings which are held annually, or when necessary, and comprise a committee of experts from within and outside of the UT. It ensures that practices and standards within industry are incorporated into the OMT programme and provides opportunities for employers of novice employees who are undergoing experiential training to provide feedback on their progress.
- 2) Observational data were obtained in the workplace by video-recordings which were used to observe written communication practices in the business office environment.
- 3) Interview data were obtained by conducting interviews with the senior personnel of organisations who employ OMT novice employees. The interviews were tape recorded and the transcripts were analysed in order to identify the recurring patterns and perceptions.
- 4) Interview data were also obtained from six novice employees who were employed for six months for the experiential training component of the OMT programme. The interviews were tape recorded and the transcripts were analysed in order to identify the recurring patterns and perceptions.

#### 3.5.1 Documentary data

Documentary data were obtained in the following ways:

- Minutes of the Advisory Committee meetings comprising representatives from industry, the CPUT, the subject co-ordinators and the academics of the OMT Department. The minutes of the meetings of the Advisory Committee held in March 2003, October 2005 and a feedback report of the April 2007 meeting, were available and these were studied.
- The Personal Skills Assessment forms from employers on the 68 novice employees' performances on completion of their experiential training during 2007 were also examined.
- Examples of novice employees' writing produced at the workplace sites.

### 3.5.2 Observational data

Video-recordings of 30 to 45 minutes were used to observe written communication practices in the business office environment. This data were systematised in order to show frequency and other patterns in activities required of employees. The observations were systematically captured as a way of triangulating data from documents and interviews. Permission was obtained from the employers to observe the OMT novice employees in their workplaces with regard to business writing practices.

One novice employee in the position of Assistant Administration Clerk was observed at a medium-sized company, two novice employees in the positions of Administrative Personnel Assistants were observed at a small private company, three novice employees in the positions of Administrative Assistants were observed at a large private company, one novice employee in the position of Debtors Clerk was observed at a large retail company, one novice employee in the position of Receptionist was observed at a medium-sized company and one novice employee in the position of Intern Administrator was observed at a small company. An observation schedule (Appendix D: Observation schedule for novice employees) was developed to capture the data recorded during the observation periods of novice employees undergoing their experiential training at the workplaces. Figure 3.4 shows an example of questions 1 – 5 of the observation schedule for novice employees.

		Most often	Often	Seldom	Not at all	Comments
1	Is there interaction between the employer and novice employee?					
2	Is the novice employee involved with producing electronic written documentation?					
3	Does the novice employee have to use voice mail/digital voice recording in order to produce business documentation?					
4	Does the novice employee have a business-like approach to the production of the business writing documentation?					
5	Does the novice employee evaluate the written documentation produced in the workplace?					

**Figure 3.4: Questions 1 – 5 of the observation schedule for novice employees**

The details of the company, the employer and the novice employee were entered on the schedules. The videos were examined and the schedules completed taking into account the types and frequency of business writing practices observed during the visits to the workplaces.

### 3.5.3 Interview data

This section discusses the interview data of the employers and of the novice employees.

#### *Interview data: employers*

Interviews lasting approximately 45 minutes were conducted with the Settlement Manager of a large retail company and the Head of Library and Information Services of a large private company, the Senior Administration Officer Human Resources Development and the Director of two medium-sized companies, the Sales Director of a small private company and the Director of a small private training company who employ OMT novice employees undergoing their experiential training. The interviews were semi-standardised comprising predetermined questions which were posed to the participants in a systematic and consistent manner by the researcher.

The employers were allowed to discuss issues beyond the confines of the questions and both the employer and researcher were allowed to provide explanations and clarifications where necessary. Permission was obtained to tape record five interviews; the sixth employer asked not to be tape recorded and notes were taken from this interview. The transcripts were analysed for recurring patterns and perceptions.

The interview schedule (refer to Appendix E) included a section consisting of general questions requiring the employer to provide information on the company and its work. These were followed by the interview questions regarding the business writing practices of the company and the performances of the OMT novice employees. Figure 3.5 shows an example of questions 1 - 10 of the interview schedule.

1. What is the language of business in your company?
2. Are any other languages used? If so, please elaborate.
3. What types of written documents are used in your company?
4. In your experience, which of these documents do novice employees find difficult to produce?
5. Please elaborate on those business writing documents which OMT novice employees were unable to produce?
6. Which of these business documents have novice employees been able to produce to your satisfaction?
7. What do you feel the OMT academics at the CPUT should focus on in their training with regard to written communication?
8. Which electronic written communications are utilised in your company?
9. Do you think that the novice employees are able to meet the electronic written communication requirements of your company? If not, please elaborate.
10. Do you believe that the novice employees have a business-like approach to the production of the business writing documentation required at your workplace?

**Figure 3.5: Example of interview schedule for employers**

### *Interview data: novice employees*

Interviews of approximately 30 minutes duration were conducted with six OMT novice employees who were undergoing the experiential training component of the OMT programme at two large companies, two medium-sized companies and two small companies. Three were ESL novice employees and three spoke English as their home language.

The interviews were semi-standardised comprising predetermined questions which the researcher posed to the participants in a systematic and consistent manner, allowing the novice employees to discuss issues beyond the confines of the questions. Both the novice employees and researcher provided explanations where necessary. The interviews were tape recorded and the transcripts analysed according to recurring patterns and perceptions.

The interview schedule (refer to Appendix F) comprised questions requiring the novice employees to provide information on the business writing practices they had undertaken at the companies. Figure 3.6 shows an example of questions 1 – 10 of the interview schedule.

1. What is the language of business in your company?
2. Are any other languages used? If so, please elaborate.
3. Are you involved with the production of electronic written communications in your company? If your answer is yes, please elaborate on the documents which you have produced.
4. Do you tend to produce written documentation as an individual or in collaboration with other employees? If your answer is that you collaborate with others, please elaborate on how this is done.
5. Are there documents which you have found difficult to produce or were unable to produce? If your answer is yes, please elaborate.
6. Do you have regular interaction with the employer on the production of written communication?
7. Do you have to obtain clarification from the employer in order to produce the written documentation?
8. Are you required to be involved with other duties while trying to produce the written documentation? If your answer is yes, please elaborate.
9. Are you required to work with other staff members on the production of written documentation?
10. Are you required to forward the written documentation produced to customers/clients?

**Figure 3.6: Example of the interview schedule for novice employees**

## **3.6 Data capture and analysis**

In this section the capture and analysis of HE data and workplace data is discussed. The HE data comprises data obtained from an analysis of student surveys, the curriculum, interview data and observational data. The workplace data comprises data obtained from the documentary data, interview data and observational data.

### 3.6.1 Data capture and analysis: HE

Primary data, both numeric and textual, were obtained using surveys as well as interviews with the communication academics. In so doing, descriptive as well as evaluative information may be obtained (Mouton, 2001). The unit of analysis is business writing practice and documents were studied and

contexts, writers, genres, purposes and audiences were identified. Interviews were transcribed and coded according to Geisler's (2004) content analysis methods for identifying themes and patterns within writing practices. Observation schedules were produced in order to identify types and frequency of business writing practices displayed in the classes.

Information on business writing practices obtained through the surveys, observational, and documentary data were categorised according to its context, writer, genre, purpose and audience. Genres can be identified by their socially recognised purpose and by their common characteristics of form (Yates & Orlikowski, 2002). The analysis enabled an understanding of writing practices as being composed of a variety of related codes, genres and ways of communication linked to specific social situations and traditions (Bazerman & Prior, 2004).

*Capture and analysis of student survey data*

Data were provided by the 265 students who responded to the survey (Appendix A). These data were captured in Excel spreadsheets for the quantitative and qualitative data. Table 3.2 provides an example of how the quantitative data were captured.

**Table 3.2: Example of survey data analysis**

Campus X	P T	Yr			A2 Campus			B1 Home Language											B2 P/T Work		B3 prior writing		B4 Duration			B5 High school	
		1	2	X	Y	Z	English	Afrikaans	Xhosa	Setswana	Zulu	Sesotho	French	Swazi	Tshivenda	Sepedi	Tswana	Chinese	Y	N	Y	N	6m or less	7 months-2yrs	2/more	Y	N
STD01		1		1							1							1		1						1	
STD02		1		1													1		1							1	
STD03		1		1				1											1							1	
STD04		1		1				1											1							1	
STD05		1		1		1	1												1							1	
STD06		1		1				1										1								1	
STD07		1		1				1											1							1	
STD08		1		1		1													1								
STD09		1		1			1												1								
STD10		1		1			1											1			1						1

The responses to related questions were analysed together, for example, questions 6, 7 and 9 related to the students' self-evaluation of their business writing abilities, questions 8, 10 and 12 related to the genres of writing, namely, the types, the degree of familiarity and the amount of practice students had received, and questions 11 and 13 related to the students' evaluation of the business writing practices of the communication course. Quantitative survey data were analysed using percentages and frequency tables.

When analysing the responses to the selection chart of question 8 (in which the students needed to indicate whether they had practised particular genres), the data were divided into academic and business writing genres and students' familiarity with these genres. For example, the data for note-taking, summary, essay and assignment writing constitute the academic writing genre, while writing related to the completion of telephone forms, memoranda, business letters, letters of invitation, e-mails, facsimiles, meeting correspondence, speech writing, report writing, correspondence, CVs and covering letters, would constitute the business writing genres.

Qualitative data, derived from the comments and explanations of students, were captured using Geisler's (2004) method of recording students' comments, keywords, and then allocating these to thematic strands (refer to Table 3.3 for a similar example).

All participants were allocated a number and data attributed to an individual student were identified by the code x, y or z (Campus X, Y or Z) followed by the number, for example, x20 is student number 20 from campus X.

#### *Capture and analysis of interview data*

Interviews were conducted with three of the communication lecturers. These interviews focussed on the writing requirements of their courses. The interviews were tape recorded and the transcripts analysed according to recurring patterns and perceptions. Table 3.3 provides an example of the interview data capture and analysis.

The participants were allocated a number and data attributed to an individual academic were identified by A (academic) followed by a number, for example, A1 is academic 1 of the three academics who participated in the interviews.

#### *Capture and analysis of observational data*

Table 3.4 is an example of the data obtained from the observation schedules and video recordings which were captured on an Excel spreadsheet. The data were recorded for the classes observed and analysed according to the totals of all four observation periods.

**Table 3.3: Example of interview data capture and analysis**

TEMPLATE FOR INTERVIEWS OF COMMUNICATION ACADEMIC STAFF									
Question	Participant: Academic 1 (A1)			Participant: Academic 2 (A2)			Participant: Academic 3 (A3)		
	Transcript	Keyword	Code	Transcript	Keyword	Code	Transcript	Keyword	Code
1. What academic writing skills do you teach the OMT students?	Use academic writing guide, the Writing Centre assists with teaching students assignment writing skills. Find standard students' writing is very weak and some require a bridging course.	Standard writing weak  Writing Centre  Bridging course	Context  Method  Student levels  Support	Assignment writing, topic analysis, selection of information & appropriate resources. Internet not always authentic. Structure of essay, paragraph. Referencing-in-text & list. At end essay questions given out. Students find referencing very difficult and are not used to thinking for themselves.	Appropriate resources  Student difficulty with referencing  Not independent thinkers	Context  Method  Student levels	Problems of plagiarism, analyse topic, paragraphs, assignments, introduction, content, conclusion, structure, referencing, summaries. 1 <sup>st</sup> yr students writing one long run of sentences, cannot do paragraphs, cannot think for themselves.	Cannot write paragraph  Run of sentences  Cannot think for themselves	Context  Method  Student levels
2. What methods do you employ to teach academic writing skills?	I try to relate to real life problems with plagiarism. Use Writing Centre to provide support. I explain difficulties with referencing. Students must read hand-outs, textbooks/notes.	Writing Centre  Referencing difficult	Method  Support	Tell students tertiary different- with another kind of reading & writing. Use worksheets, teach and exercises. Language is not communication and I am a communication lecturer, I am not a language teacher.	Tertiary different kind of writing  Not a language teacher	Method  Support	Vast range of those from excellent schooling systems and those who are not. Academic writing, use Writing Centre, give overview of problems of plagiarism, not just putting name on quote as writing takes practice.	Different student levels  Practice  Writing Centre	Method  Support

**Table 3.4: Example of capture of observational data**

	Academic: A Task: Meeting correspondence Level: 1 <sup>st</sup> year students	Most often	Often	Seldom	Not at all	Comments
1	Is there interaction between the academic and students?	1				
2	Does the academic make use of teaching aids, e.g. OHP, textbooks, notes etc.?		1			OHP, hand-out, books
3	Does the academic demonstrate the business writing skill?		1			
4	Does the academic model workplace writing practices?	1				On whiteboard
5	Does the academic model academic writing practices?				1	
6	Do students have access to textbooks/notes/examples of writing?	1				

### 3.6.2 Data capture and analysis: workplaces

Both qualitative and quantitative primary data were obtained using observations as well as interviews with the employers and students in order to obtain descriptive and evaluative information. The unit of analysis is business writing practice and the types and frequency of business writing practices

displayed in the workplace were identified. Interviews were transcribed and coded and observations undertaken in the workplace analysed in order to identify recurring patterns of writing practices.

Business writing practices of the workplaces obtained through the observational and documentary data were categorised according to context, writers, genres, purposes and audiences of the theoretical model of written communication (refer to Figure 2.5) as discussed in chapter 2. Research shows that when students enter the workplace the knowledge they bring with them is changed so that it can be understood (Singley & Anderson, 1989; Latour, 1999; Engel-Hills et al., 2005).

#### *Capture and analysis of documentary data*

The minutes of the Advisory Committee meetings of March 2003, October 2005 and feedback report of April 2007 were analysed according to context, writers, genres, purposes and audiences.

The feedback reports from employers discussing the progress of students undergoing their experiential training were studied. Data from these forms were analysed, using percentages and frequency tables. The 68 participants who assessed novice employees on the Personal Skills Assessment forms were allocated a number and data attributed to the individual were identified by the code P (Personal Skills Assessment forms) followed by E (employer) and then the number, for example, PE6 is employer number 6 who completed the Personal Skills Assessment forms.

Examples of novice employees' writings produced at the workplace sites were analysed with regard to context, writers, genres, purposes and audiences.

#### *Capture and analysis of employers' interview data*

Interviews were conducted with six of the employers. These interviews focussed on the writing requirements of the workplace and the performances of the OMT students (novice employees) undergoing their experiential training. The interviews were tape recorded and the transcripts analysed in order to identify recurring patterns and perceptions. (refer to Table 3.3 for a similar example). The participants were allocated a number and data attributed to the individual were identified by the code I (interview) followed by E (employer) and then the number, for example, IE5 is employer number 5 who was interviewed.

#### *Capture and analysis of novice employees' interview data*

The interviews conducted with the six novice employees undertaking their experiential training at the workplace sites focussed on their writing experiences at these sites. The interviews were tape recorded and the transcripts were analysed in order to identify recurring patterns and perceptions (refer to Table 3.3 for a similar example). The participants were allocated a number and data attributed to the

individual were identified by the code N for novice employee, and then the number, for example, N3 is novice employee number 3 who participated in the interviews.

*Capture and analysis of observational data*

The data were recorded for the observation periods of the novice employees’ writing practice at six workplaces. Writing practices were video-recorded. An observation schedule (refer to Appendix D) was used to focus the observation. Data from the observations were analysed using percentages and frequency tables. Table 3.5 shows an example of the data obtained from the observation schedules and video recordings of the writing practices in the workplaces which were captured on an Excel spreadsheet.

The data were recorded for the workplaces observed and analysed according to the totals of all six observation periods.

**Table 3.5: Example of capture of observational data at the workplaces**

	Employer: 1 Novice Employee: 1	Date: Company:	Most often	Often	Seldom	Not at all	Comments
1	Is there interaction between the employer and novice employee?				1		Answering telephone, greeting clients
2	Is the novice employee involved with producing electronic written documentation?			1			Typing letter
3	Does the novice employee have to use voice mail/digital voice recording in order to produce business writing?					1	
4	Does the novice employee have a business-like approach to the production of the business writing documentation?					1	
5	Does the novice employee evaluate the written documentation produced in the workplace?					1	

**3.7 The position of the researcher in the research**

As a 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year Communication lecturer in the OMT Department, I sometimes hold the position of researcher from the position of outsider and at times I hold the position of academic. Potential investigator subjectivity has been highlighted in cases where the researcher is involved as a participant in the subject under investigation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thus research procedures and protocols become all the more important in the reduction of research bias (Goulding, 2002). The consistent application of accepted methodologies, such as those described in sections 3.2 and 3.3 helped to limit researcher bias. The researcher’s years of experience in both the workplace and in HE, coupled with a commitment to preparing students to enter the workplace and to become life-long learners, enabled a high level of trust in the interviews with academic staff, employers and students as novice employees.

### **3.8 Ethical considerations**

According to Struwig and Stead (2001) it is important that participants voluntarily agree to participate in the research; they must be informed that they are free to decline to be involved, at no detriment to themselves. The confidentiality of the participants must be respected. Permission was obtained from all participants in the research and the confidentiality of the students, employers, academics and novice employees was maintained throughout the research process.

Students were asked to voluntarily complete the surveys and return them to the researcher. Students were allowed to ask questions for the purpose of obtaining clarity. Permission was obtained from three communication academics and their students to allow the researcher into the classroom and to allow video-recordings of the classes. Permission was obtained from the employers of the OMT novice employees and also from the novice employees to examine business documentation and to undertake observations in the workplaces which were video-recorded.

All data accumulated from surveys, observations, documentary results and interviews from the HE sites and the employers were kept in a locked security cabinet to ensure the confidentiality of participants, institutions and organisations.

### **3.9 Summary**

The research design of a comparative study requires data collection in two different sites, and the systematisation of this data in ways that enable the comparison because different sites (e.g., HE and a business practice) are likely to contain different practices which cannot always be captured with the same research instruments. For example, the researcher may use an interview at site A and an observation at site B. This will produce different data, but these data can be compared when the common elements (such as context, writer, genre, purpose, audience) are isolated, systematised and examined. For these reasons it is important to have a theoretical framework according to which the different data can be examined.

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used in the study. Data were collected at two different sites, namely, HE and the workplace. Participants from both sites were asked to participate in the research. All 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year OMT students were included in the survey and all the full-time communication academics at the three HE sites were interviewed. In order to build a record of the business writing practices of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year OMT students at the HE sites, a survey was designed and conducted with all the students, documentary data at the HE sites were used for the purpose of clarification and triangulation, observational data were obtained by video-recording written communication practices in the classrooms and interview data were obtained from three communication academics.

In order to establish a record of the business writing practices of office managers in the workplace, documentary data were obtained from the minutes of Advisory Committee meetings, Personal Skills Assessment forms and examples of business writing practices of the workplace. Observational data were obtained by video-recordings of written communication practices of novice employees. Interview data were obtained from senior personnel of organisations who employ OMT novice employees and from novice employees who were undergoing their experiential training at the workplaces.

The data were then captured and compared with a view to understanding relationships and enhancing their alignment. Permission was obtained from all participants and all data accumulated were kept in a locked security cabinet to ensure the confidentiality of participants, institutions and organisations. The consistent application of accepted research methodologies and the use of a variety of research methods producing data from multiple sources, helped to limit researcher bias.

In the next chapter, the findings from the research undertaken at the HE sites are discussed and analysed.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA AT THE HIGHER EDUCATION SITES**

I model business writing skills by telling students that they need to think like office professionals...everything we do is about business... writing is demonstrated on the whiteboard...overhead projector and on posters in the classrooms ... I augment class work with my own texts... readings...articles...newspaper hand-outs... worksheets ...textbook...videos and presentations which is at the culmination of projects...(A2).

### **4.1 Introduction**

Chapter four presents and interprets data obtained at the HE sites. There are two levels of organisation in chapter 4. Firstly, data obtained from the different sources, namely: 1) curriculum data, 2) student survey data, 3) classroom observation data, 4) data from academic staff interviews and 5) data from student assessment and moderators' reports. Secondly, under each of these headings, the data is discussed following the theoretical model of written communication developed from the literature (refer to section 2.5), namely: 1) the contexts of writing, 2) students as writers, 3) genres of writing, and 4) the audience and purpose of the writing. These categories together with themes drawn from the research findings comprise the sub-headings under which the research findings are discussed.

### **4.2 Curriculum Data**

Curriculum data were obtained from curriculum documents, in particular the student guides which explain the requirements of the Communication I and II courses. The curricular data are discussed according to the theoretical model, as explained in section 4.1.

#### 4.2.1 Contexts of writing: simulating the workplace in HE

The HE context comprises a community of academics and students engaged in processes of learning and development. Academics are often involved in their own research activities and, in some instances, with consulting, but predominantly they are focused on teaching.

##### *Simulated workplace contexts*

The academics are in the profession of communication educators preparing students to take on the roles of novice employees and eventually professionals in the workplace. The HE context attempts to simulate the workplace environment in order to prepare students to enter the workplace. Students are required to adhere to values which simulate those of the workplace such as punctuality, the adherence to deadlines for the submission of tasks and assignments and the presentation of written and oral feedback reports.

Business writing is not common in an academic environment. In simulating a business environment academics make use of case-studies, textbooks, notes and hand-outs in an attempt to ensure that class work and assignments are aligned with workplace writing and practices. Figure 4.1 is an example of the hand-out of a covering letter to an application for a workplace post. This is a generic covering letter for a job application provided for students which would be transferable to the situation in the workplace. The covering letter used in the workplace is transformed and simplified to be utilised in the context of HE which is governed by assessment criteria and so on. It is recognised that in academic settings business writing is often ‘pedagogized’ for learning purposes (Winberg et al., 2005: 1) as it is taken from the workplace and re-formatted to the requirements of HE. The novice employees need to re-format and adapt it to meet the requirements of the various organisations by whom they will be employed.

	Your address
	Date
<p>The Manager Cape Gate Mall PO Box 10 CAPE TOWN 8000</p>	
<p>Dear Sir/Madam</p>	
<p><b>Application for Position of Administration Manager</b></p>	
<p>I wish to apply for the position of Administration Manager as advertised in the Cape Times of 10 April 2000.</p>	
<p>I believe that I can make a contribution to your company because of my qualifications and experience in office administration. In particular, my qualifications and experience in the following areas will enable me to contribute effectively:</p>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) My Diploma in Office Management &amp; Technology from Cape Peninsula University of Technology.</li> <li>2) My experience in marketing during the past three years.</li> <li>3) My experience as the administration supervisor over the last two years.</li> </ol>	
<p>I plan to pursue office management, and am at the moment studying part-time for a B.Tech Degree.</p>	
<p>I attach curriculum vitae containing the names of three referees. These people may be contacted in confidence.</p>	
<p>My telephone numbers are: Work (021) 678 007, Home (021) 234 911</p>	
<p>I am available for an interview at short notice.</p>	
<p>Yours faithfully</p>	
<p><i>S Wilson</i></p>	
<p>S Wilson</p>	

**Figure 4.1: Example of a covering letter**

#### 4.2.2 Students as writers: developing the basic skills

The students’ guides, the main source of data for this sub-section, are addressed to the students. The guide provides basic information to the students with regard to the course aims, outcomes and written assessment requirements. The first year guide assumes that the students do not have much background

knowledge in business writing and thus provides more information on these aspects than the second year student guide, which assumes that students are developing competence in these areas. For example:

‘Tutorials will be arranged for learners doing Communication 1. The focus will be on improving writing skills. Consider the tutorials a compulsory course component. You will only improve with regular attendance and regular submission of written pieces’ (Scholtz, 2007a: 5).

Attendance registers were maintained for all courses of the OMT programme during the period of study. All instances of students not attending classes regularly were referred for the attention of the HOD. If a student's attendance did not improve, he/she was advised to de-register from that course.

#### 4.2.3 Genres of writing: balancing the academic and professional

The curriculum focus is business and business writing, which includes the sub-genres of the writing of letters, concise correspondence such as memoranda, e-mails and telephone messages, reports, meeting correspondence, curriculum vitae and portfolios. These constitute the business writing sub-genres and are essential to writing in the workplace. Figure 4.2 is an example of the unit on report writing for Communication 1. Unit 8 explains in detail the outcomes students are required to achieve once they have completed this unit. It also provides the details of the methodology which will be used to teach students these skills and the assessment methods and criteria which will be used to assess whether students are competent in writing reports.

The genres of writing, namely, academic writing genres, business writing genres and electronic communication genres constitute the Communication 1 and 11 curricula. Genres are identified by their purpose, which is socially recognised, and by their ‘common characteristics of form’ (Yates & Orlikowski, 2002: 14). The purpose of a genre is not merely an individual’s motive for communicating a message to a receiver, but rather that which is ‘socially constructed and recognised by the relevant organisational community for typical situations’ (Yates & Orlikowski, 2002:15). For example, in the HE context, meetings held to review assessment results are recognised by the academic community. Writers need to acquire genre knowledge and understand the conventions of a particular kind of written text. Research on the writing experiences of graduates of a business writing programme show that successful writers rely on six knowledge-based practices (refer to section 2.3.2) comprising genre knowledge, writing process knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, subject matter knowledge, discourse community and metacognitive knowledge (Walters, Hunter & Giddens, 2007).

#### *Academic writing Genres*

The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students are required to write academic essays and assignments across the subjects of the OMT programmes. Students are taught academic writing genres such as essay and assignment

writing, note and summary writing and referencing skills mainly during the Communication 1 course. However, attention is also given to assignment writing and referencing skills during the Communication 11 course. Continuous assessment of academic writing genres takes place throughout both the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year as students are required to utilise these skills throughout the courses.

<b>UNIT 8: REPORT WRITING</b>	
Purpose: Mastering of the skills needed to compose simple routine reports within the department or organisation.	
<p>1. SPECIFIC OUTCOMES</p> <p>On completion of this unit you will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain the role of routine reports in your particular job situation.</li> <li>• Write a clear, concise, logically structured report on issues falling within your job description.</li> <li>• Present a document that, in terms of professional appearance, meets an acceptable standard.</li> </ul> <p>3. METHODOLOGY</p> <p>Lectures on basic principles of report writing Exercises on passive voice and on the distinction between fact and opinion Video on report writing</p>	<p>2. EMBEDDED KNOWLEDGE</p> <p>The role of reports in personal and professional lives Reading and summarising skills Basic text structure: beginning, middle, end The language of reports: objective, impersonal Passive voice structures Relevant vocabulary The difference between fact and opinion Referencing techniques</p> <p>3. METHODOLOGY CONTINUED</p> <p>Discussion (in small groups eventually sharing opinions with entire class) of model texts and examples from the business world. Pair drafting of elementary reports within students' frame of reference. Process writing - drafting, revising and editing.</p>
<p>4. ASSESSMENT</p> <p>Assessment mode: Application of knowledge and skills to write a routine report of approximately 250 words.</p> <p>5. CRITICAL CROSS-FIELD OUTCOMES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work effectively with others as a member of a group.</li> <li>• Identify and solve problems critically and creatively.</li> <li>• Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information.</li> <li>• Communicate effectively using language skills in oral and written presentation.</li> </ul>	<p>CRITERIA</p> <p>Adequate, relevant content Appropriate structure/format Logical development Clear, concise, precise language usage Objective style and tone Appropriate register Professional presentation</p>

**Figure 4.2: Unit 8: report writing for Communication 1**

### *Business writing Genres*

The business writing genres of the Communication 1 and 11 courses for OMT students include the following sub-genres: telephone message forms, form design, the design of posters, memoranda, business letters, formal invitations, covering letters for job applications, curriculum vitae, e-mails, meeting correspondence, reports, questionnaires and interview forms, and presentation and speech outlines. These business writing sub-genres constitute both the Communication 1 and 11 curricula. They are, however, approached from different perspectives and in more detail during the 2<sup>nd</sup> year. During the 1<sup>st</sup> year for example, job applications and CV writing would be in response to adverts for

part-time or vacation work. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, job applications and CV writing would be for permanent employment. Figure 4.3 is an example of the minutes of a meeting written by a 2<sup>nd</sup> year student.

<b>SEMINAR COMMITTEE 9</b>		<i>Action Column</i>
Minutes of the monthly meeting held in Room 1.23 on Thursday, 13 March 2008 at 12:30.		
<b>1. Opening and welcome</b>	The chairperson opened the meeting at 12:30 and welcomed all members.	
<b>2. Attendance Register</b>	Ms K Krige (Chairperson), Ms J Lotz (Secretary), Mr W Agwu, Ms D Mayaba (Treasurer) and Ms L Makeni.	
<b>3. Apologies</b>	Ms J Lotz reported that there were no apologies.	
<b>4. Minutes of previous meeting</b>	The minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 February were taken as read and signed off.	
<b>5. Matters arising</b>		
5.1	Venue Ms J Lotz and Ms L Makeni will report back by the next meeting with prices regarding the Good Hope Centre.	JL LM 7/4
5.2	Guest speaker Ms K Krige confirmed Ms Berkman will be the guest speaker. Ms Berkman will do the speech for free.	
<b>6. New Business</b>		
6.1.	Dates The date decided on for the seminar is Friday, 16 May at 11:00.	
6.2	Sponsor The proposal 'that possible sponsors should be approached' was accepted. Proposed by: Ms D Mayaba Seconded by: Ms L Makeni All members will report back by the next meeting.	All 7/4
6.3	Guests confirmations Ms J Lotz will report back by the following meeting on the exact amount of guest speakers.	JL 7/4
<b>7. General</b>	There were no general comments.	
<b>8. Closure</b>	There being no further business to discuss, the chairperson closed the meeting at 12:50.	
_____	_____	_____
Chairperson	Secretary	Date

**Figure 4.3: Example of the minutes of a meeting written by a 2<sup>nd</sup> year student**

According to Russell (1997) writing plays an integral role in modern societies. Russell has researched the roles which writing plays in various activities, and more particularly in those activities in which writing mediates work. The role of business writing in the preparation of the OMT students for the workplace is seen as essential to their success. Students are therefore provided with opportunities to practise their business writing skills in the classroom and by means of assignments and assessments.

*Electronic communication genres*

The Communication 1 and 11 syllabi include the writing of e-mails and facsimiles, and the use of PowerPoint presentations as these are essential to the modern business place where computer-mediated communication (CMC) has taken over the field of correspondence (Baumann 1998; Sullivan 2000). OMT students are taught the guidelines for writing e-mails and e-mail etiquette. Although e-mail have not yet replaced formal business correspondence, it is an integral part of written business correspondence and of the workplace (Grant & Borchers, 2002). While SMS communication writing

skills do not form part of the syllabi, this fast developing electronic business writing medium is utilised in some workplaces.

Information Administration is one of the main courses of the OMT programme. It is a three-year course and includes the study of the MS suite, Desktop Publishing, Website design and use of the internet and financial systems, such as Pastel. Students are required to use the computer to produce projects and assignments and to do PowerPoint presentations for all courses of the OMT programme.

#### 4.2.4 The audience and purpose: writing for academics or clients?

Each of the course outcomes aims to ensure that students become competent in producing the business writing genres that they will be required to produce in the workplace. Each of these outcomes is covered in detail in the units. Thus the 'real' audiences of students' writings are the OMT academic staff and assessors. The 'simulated' audiences are the customers, clients and staff of the companies by whom they would be employed once they enter the workplace. In line with the requirements for OBE the Communication 1 and 11 courses follow the guidelines of continuous assessment which means that the students' performances are assessed throughout the year by means of oral and written tests, individual, pair and group assignments, prepared and impromptu presentations, and participation in group and class activities. There is no formal examination at the end of the year for this subject.

The written and oral assignments and tests total 100%. In order for students to pass Communication 1 and 11, they must obtain an aggregate of 50%. Tests and assignments are moderated across campuses with communication academic staff sharing the tasks of designing tests and assignments and also moderation. Assignments require that students undertake research and include the production of a number of business writing genres. Figure 4.4 is an example of a business correspondence assignment for 2<sup>nd</sup> year students.

It is necessary for the business documentation used in the classrooms to be as authentic as possible and for the workplace situation to be simulated as authentically as possible so that students are given opportunities to practise those business genres which they would be required to create or utilise in the workplace (Jeong, Taylor & Chi, 2000).

However, according to Miller, 'academia should not simply design our courses and curricula to replicate existing practices,.....making our students "more valuable to the industry"; we ought instead to question those practices and encourage our students to do so too'(1989: 23). The idea is that business writing pedagogy in HE education institutions needs to be influenced by those practices preferred and accepted in the workplace. Those practices also need to be influenced by that knowledge preferred and accepted by HE institutions. In this way students will be less likely to value workplace

practices that are ineffectual or detrimental in any given workplace culture (Spilka, 1993). This is significant to this study as HE needs to prepare students for present and future workplaces and fulfils an important role in maintaining academic standards and ethics which add value to society. Students entering the workplace should be prepared not only to learn from the workplace, but should also be able to transfer new and more effective business writing knowledge and skills to the workplace.

<u>BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE – EVENT MANAGEMENT</u>		
<b><u>OUTCOMES:</u></b>		
1. To determine your competence in planning a corporate event. 2. To determine your competence in writing various examples of concise business correspondence and business letters. 3. To determine your competence in presentation skills, meeting procedure and meeting correspondence.		
<b><u>ASSIGNMENT:</u></b>		
As a 2 <sup>nd</sup> year OMT student you will be required to organise a seminar. You have been asked to plan, co-ordinate and manage this event. Design a letterhead for all your correspondence.		
<b><u>Correspondence to be included:</u></b>		
1.	<b><u>Introduction</u></b> – Provide details of your company /what the event is about/ why it is being held/ for whom / what will the theme be/ why have you chosen that theme? What is your company called? What is your involvement in planning this event?	(10)
2.	Send a <b>memo</b> to the organising committee. Inform them that a meeting will be held to discuss..... (Give your own reason for calling the meeting).	(10)
3.	Write a <b>letter</b> to a hotel or conference centre requesting the use of a venue. Provide all the necessary details. Remember that the venue should be appropriate to the theme of the event.	(15)
4.	Write a <b>letter of invitation</b> to a guest speaker, which could be a motivational speaker, a celebrity or an expert on whatever the event is about.	(15)
5.	Design an <b>invitation</b> for the event.	(10)
6.	You forgot to include catering for three Muslim and four vegetarian delegates. Send an <b>e-mail</b> to the catering manager at the hotel/ conference centre, requesting meals for Muslim and vegetarian delegates.	(10)
7.	Compile the <b>minutes</b> for one of the meetings held to discuss the event. Include an Action column when compiling your minutes. (Include the notice and agenda for the meeting )	(20)
8.	Write your opening speech in full. You should have a clear introduction, main points and a conclusion.	(10)
<b>MARK ALLOCATION</b>		
<b><u>Memo/e-mail</u></b>	<b><u>Letters</u></b>	<b><u>Invitation</u></b>
Format: 2	Format: 3	Negative marking: -1 for
Content/structure: 5	Content/structure: 7	content/structure up to a
		max of 6
Language usage: 3	Language usage: 5	Language usage : 4
Refer to the assessment criteria given as an addendum in your learner guide. This assignment forms part of continuous assessment and has a weighting of 15% towards your final mark.		
FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT: WRITING EXERCISES 5%		
SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT: FINAL ASSIGNMENT 10%		

**Figure 4.4: Example of a business correspondence assignment**

### 4.3 Data from student surveys

A survey was conducted with 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year OMT students at 3 campuses in the Western Cape (refer to Appendix A for a copy of the student survey questionnaire). The purpose of the survey was to establish the frequency of exposure to, and practice of, academic writing, business writing and electronic writing genres amongst students, and to survey the opinions of the students on the business writing they had learned as part of the Communication 1 and 11 courses.

#### 4.3.1 Contexts of writing: the relationship between HE and work

The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year OMT students were required to evaluate whether the HE context had adequately prepared them to enter the business world, and whether they believed that all the business writing practices taught to them in the course were necessary in the workplace. Table 4.1 shows the students' understanding of the HE context as a preparation for the workplace.

**Table 4.1: Students' evaluation of the business writing course**

Level	Business writing practices learned are adequate preparation for the workplace	Business writing practices taught in the communication course are necessary in workplace
1 <sup>st</sup> yr	90%	97%
2 <sup>nd</sup> yr	94%	99%

Almost all the 1<sup>st</sup> year and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students responded positively to the question about whether the business writing practices in which they had participated in the communication course were adequate preparation for the workplace. Almost all the students felt that the business writing practices taught in the communication courses are necessary in the workplace.

#### 4.3.2 Students as writers: the accuracy of students' self-assessments

A profile of the students emerged from the survey data, including their different levels, languages spoken, and students' self evaluation of their business writing skills.

##### *Student levels and campuses*

There were 265 students from three different campuses who participated in the survey. Table 4.2 shows the student profiles in terms of their sites and levels of study.

**Table 4.2: Student profile**

Campus	Number of students	Level	Status
Campus X	38	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	Full time
Campus X	28	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	Full time
Campus Y	27	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	Full time
Campus Y	23	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	Full time
Campus Z	62	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	Full time
Campus Z	58	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	Full time
Campus Z	21	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	Part time
Campus Z	8	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	Part time

### Student languages

Students speak a variety of different languages, with only 11,49% speaking English as their home language; 30,27% speak Afrikaans as their home language and the majority of students, namely, 46,36%, speak Xhosa as their home language. Only 3,45% of the students are English and Afrikaans bilingual, 0,38% speak English and Xhosa as their home language, as was the case in respect of English and French. The rest of the students speak Sesotho, French, Setswana, Zulu, Tshivenda, Swazi, Tswana, and Chinese as their home languages. The data are summarised in Figure 4.5.

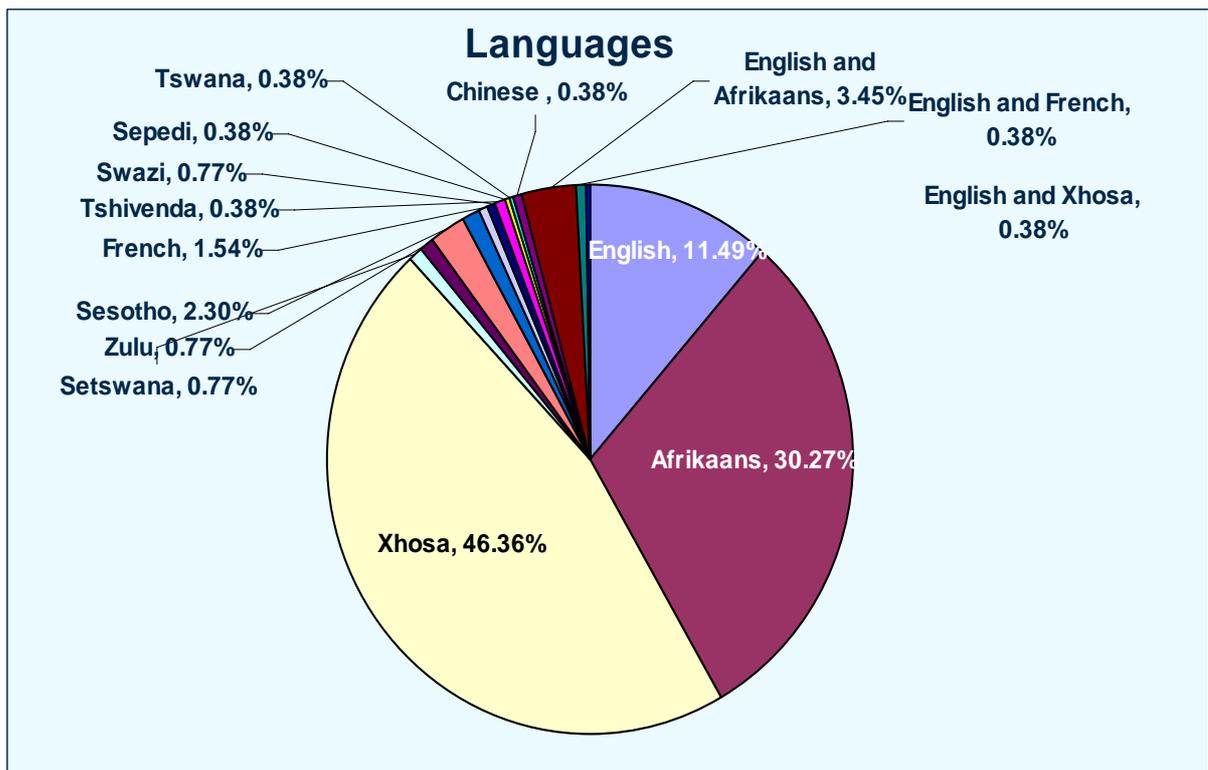


Figure 4.5: Chart reflecting the percentages of students according to their home languages

The figures, rounded off for the predominant languages by province census of 2001, (SouthAfrica.info, n.d.) reflect the following predominant languages in the Western Cape: Afrikaans 55%, English 19% and Xhosa 23%. This information correlates with the findings of the student responses as these three languages are the predominant languages amongst 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students at the three campuses.

The majority of Communication 1 and 11 students are ESL learners. Academic and business writing skills are learned in the medium of the English language. Studies report on ESL students' difficulties with regard to technical writing as being in the following areas: lexico-grammatical choices, style and register, inappropriateness, and problems with the organisation of texts. More recently, studies report on the socio-cultural issues which impact on the attainment of competence in technical writing in English (Winberg et al., 2005). This has implications for the development of the communication

curricula, methods of teaching and how assessment is planned. For example, academics will spend less time on teaching students in the classroom how to write e-mails as many students have been exposed to business writing skills prior to their entry into HE (refer to Table 4.5).

*Students' evaluations of their own writing skills*

Students were required to evaluate their business writing skills, whether they considered competency in business writing skills to be essential to their success in the workplace and whether they believed that they would be able to produce the business writing documents practised in the communication classrooms when they enter the workplace. Table 4.3 gives the results of the students' evaluation of their business writing skills.

**Table 4.3: Students' evaluation of their business writing skills**

Level	Considered their business writing skills to be:			Competency in business writing	Ability to produce business writing documents in workplace
	Weak	Ave	Strong	Essential	
1 <sup>st</sup> Yr	34%	9%	42%	83%	91%
2 <sup>nd</sup> yr	30%	13%	57%	80%	94%

More than 90% of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students believed that they had the ability to produce business writing documents practised in the communication classrooms when they enter the workplace. More than 80% of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students considered competency in business writing skills to be essential to their success in the workplace.

A 1<sup>st</sup> year student, who considered his/her writing skills to be weak claimed that 'I only know the basics'(x1). One, who considered his/her business writing skills to be average said; 'I can do most of the business writing needed, but sometimes I need assistance' (y77); and one who believed that s/he had strong business writing skills stated that 'I understand how to take minutes and I study hard to understand it'(x6).

A 2<sup>nd</sup> year student who considered his/her skills to be weak said; 'I need to improve on the final touches of my business writing skills'(x48). One student, who considered his/her skills to be average claimed that 'I am currently working on my writing skills so that I can become stronger'(x43); and one who considered that s/he had strong business writing skills stated that 'I am able to relate in the working environment about the skills I have learnt'(z278).

As life-long learners, students should be given opportunities within their courses to practise the skill of self-evaluation in a number of different domains. For assessment activities to contribute to students' understanding, assessment and particularly self-assessment, needs to be demystified (Boud & Falchikov, 2005). Research has shown that the ability of students to rate themselves improves with feedback or development over time (Boud & Falchikov, 1989) and that successful writers

continuously reflect on their efforts and evaluate how well they perform and how to improve their skills (Walters, Hunter & Giddens, 2007). Findings show that expertise within a particular field produces more accurate self-assessments and that students' self-assessments of their performances on practical tasks are relatively accurate, as they become confident enough to use it in the world of practice, while self-assessment of abstract tasks is less accurate as the students need to make the connections between assessment activities and their learning (Boud & Falchikov, 1989).

#### 4.3.3 Genres of writing: students' writing experience

This sub-section deals both with the different genres that students are expected to write, as well as with their experience in these genres.

##### *Academic writing*

The questionnaire required students to indicate whether or not they had practised the sub-genres of academic writing, namely, note and instruction taking, and summary, essay and assignment writing - or whether they had only read of these sub-genres in their textbooks or notes. Table 4.4 reflects the percentages of students who responded that they had practised these academic skills in classroom activities.

**Table 4.4: Percentages of students who practised academic sub-genres in classroom activities**

Campus	Level	Note & instruction taking	Summary, essay and assignment writing
Campus X	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	76%	95%
Campus Y	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	52%	81%
Campus Z	1 <sup>st</sup> Year FT	39%	51%
Campus Z	1 <sup>st</sup> Year PT	57%	74%
Campus X	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	57%	88%
Campus Y	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	52%	83%
Campus Z	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year FT	52%	80%
Campus Z	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year PT	25%	63%

The academic skills of note and instruction taking, summary, essay and assignment writing are not specifically taught in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year Communication course, but students are required to demonstrate their knowledge of these skills when submitting class work and assignments throughout the duration of the course.

The findings show that there are differentiations in the amount of practice which 1<sup>st</sup> year OMT students receive in the academic writing skills of note and instruction taking as well as in summary, essay and assignment writing. Students are required to apply these skills throughout all of the subjects of the three year OMT programme and it is essential that students acquire and practise these basic academic skills during the 1<sup>st</sup> year of their studies.

Academic skills are specific to HE needs (Krzanowski, 2001) and the lack of practice of these skills could leave students with gaps in their understanding and interpretation of what is involved in academic writing. According to the academic literacies approach (Lea & Street, 1998), the literacy demands of the curriculum involve a variety of communicative practices, including genres, fields and disciplines. A dominant feature of academic literacy practices is the requirement that the student must be able to switch practices between one setting and another. Lea and Street (1998) refer to one explanation for problems in student writing which might be the gaps between academic staff expectations and student interpretations of what is involved in student writing.

*Business writing*

The profiles of the students at the three campuses indicate that the majority of the respondents to the surveys were full time students. At least 40% or more of the students at each campus had been exposed to business writing skills prior to their entry into HE and at two of the campuses more than half of the students had part-time work experience. A number of students had prior experience with business writing through the school curriculum or had obtained this through part-time work. The number of students, indicated per campus, who had been taught business writing skills in high school or any other institutions, and who had work experience, is shown in Table 4.5.

**Table 4.5: Professional and prior work experience**

Campus	Business writing skills High School/any other institution	Part-time work experience	Duration of work experience		
			6mths/less	7mths-2yrs	2/more yrs
X	59%	41%	15%	5%	
Y	40%	58%	20%	4%	
Z	45%	51%	15%	5%	8%

The conclusions to be drawn from these findings for the teaching of business writing skills are that, although only 11, 49% of the students speak English as their home language, the average across the three campuses shows that at least 48% of all the students have been exposed to business writing skills and at least 50% had some part-time work experience and this may well offer some benefit to the students.

*Business writing genres*

The selection chart required students to indicate whether or not they had practised or only read about the sub-genres of business writing, namely, memoranda, business letters, telephone messages, covering letters for job applications, CVs, completion of forms, e-mails, facsimiles, meeting correspondence, reports, formulation of questionnaires and interview forms, posters, presentation and speech outlines, letters of invitation and thanks, formal invitations, programmes for events and seminars, and menus for events and seminars. Table 4.6 reflects the percentages of students who responded that they had practised the business writing sub-genres in classroom activities.

Letters of invitation, thanks and formal invitations, as well as the formulation of programmes and menus, constitute the 2<sup>nd</sup> year Communication course and 1<sup>st</sup> year students would only receive some exposure to these forms of writing in information technology studies during the first year.

Table 4.6 shows that there are differentiations of practice for 1<sup>st</sup> year students at Campus Z for the writing of memos, business letters, telephone messages, form completion, e-mails and facsimiles, meeting correspondence, report writing documentation and covering letters and CV writing. The table

**Table 4.6: Percentages of students who practised business writing sub-genres in classroom activities**

Cam-pus	Level	Memos & business letters	Mes-sages & forms	E-mails & fax	Meeting corres-pondence	Report writing, questionnaires & interview forms	Posters presentations & speech outline	Letters of invitation, thanks & formal invites	Program & menu	Covering letters for job application & CV writing
X	1 Yr	83%	55%	87%	100%	97%	39%	17%	12%	99%
Y	1 Yr	87%	74%	85%	89%	89%	61%	31%	15%	89%
Z	1 Yr (Ft)	43%	35%	48%	52%	60%	40%	28%	29%	55%
Z	1 Yr (Pt)	76%	40%	67%	81%	71%	36%	43%	19%	67%
X	2 Yr	86%	55%	84%	88%	88%	59%	68%	55%	88%
Y	2 Yr	98%	63	85%	100%	100%	83%	87%	63%	100%
Z	2 Yr (Ft)	89%	79%	76%	90%	90%	72%	88%	81%	91%
Z	2 Yr (Pt)	88%	63%	69%	88%	82%	50%	75%	63%	88%

shows that 43% of the full time 1<sup>st</sup> year students practised the professional sub-genres of memorandum and business letter writing, 35% practised telephone messages and form completion, 48% e-mails and facsimiles, 52% meeting correspondence, 60% report writing, questionnaires and interview forms and 55% covering letters and CV writing in classroom activities. At campuses X and Y more students received opportunities to practise these documents which constitute the 1<sup>st</sup> year syllabus. The differences are significant in that these are the basic business writing skills which students are required to learn to prepare them for the business world.

Inadequate practice of these documents on the 1<sup>st</sup> year level would put additional pressure on both the students and staff during the 2<sup>nd</sup> year. It would be assumed that students had learnt these basic writing skills as preparation for the more advanced business writing skills which are introduced during the 2<sup>nd</sup> year (refer to section 1.4.2). It is expected that communication students attend classes regularly and generally make use of every opportunity to practise their writing skills (refer to section 4.2.2).

### *Electronic communication genres*

Students were requested to determine whether they would make use of SMSs as a business writing practice when they enter the workplace. Table 4.7 shows the responses of the students.

**Table 4.7: SMSs as business writing practice**

Level	SMS usage when entering the workplace
1 <sup>st</sup> year students	19%
2 <sup>nd</sup> year students	20%

Examples of the responses of the students who believed that they would make use of SMSs as a business writing practice when they entered the workplace were: ‘As long as your message comes across as latest technology’(x47); and ‘cell phones have become a very easy tool to reach customers’ (z249).

#### 4.3.4 The audience and purpose: real and ‘assumed’ audiences and purposes

The ‘assumed’ purpose for students’ business writing in HE is to practise and acquire the business writing skills required for their entry to the workplace. However, the real purpose for students’ business writing in HE is to meet the requirements of the curricula and the assessors.

The audiences of students’ business writing in classroom exercises of simulated workplace situations, are the readers of the business documentation in the workplace. This may be referred to as the ‘simulated’ audiences, because the ‘real’ audiences of students’ business writings are the academic staff who are the assessors of the classroom exercises, tests and assignments.

Students produce their writings to meet the discipline requirements of the ‘real’ audience, namely, the academics, and the students learn to tailor their writing to meet the needs of the assessor. In the workplace they will have to write for multiple audiences and pay attention to the ‘political considerations in workplace writing’ (Schneider & Andre, 2005: 203).

#### **4.4 Data from classroom observations**

In this sub-section, data from classroom observations are presented. The classroom observations were undertaken during lectures in which academic staff members provided instruction in business writing or which included students writing in their classrooms.

##### 4.4.1 Contexts of writing: levels of student and academic interaction

In three of the four classrooms observed there was frequent interaction between the academic staff and students, while in one classroom there was slightly less frequent interaction between the academic staff and students. In the highly interactive classrooms, students were frequently involved with

student-to-student interaction and group work, while in one classroom there was slightly less frequent student-to-student interaction and group work.

In three of the classroom observations the academic staff frequently demonstrated the business writing skills that students were required to learn, while in one classroom the academic modelled the business writing skills slightly less frequently. In the highly interactive classrooms the academic staff frequently modelled workplace writing practices in the classrooms by referring students to examples in the textbooks, expecting students to work on case-studies relating to the workplace and providing students with opportunities to access the expertise and experience of their peers.

Students were also given homework which provided additional opportunities to practise the writing skills and students were given deadlines for the submission of the business writing exercise.

In two of the classrooms, students were frequently encouraged to evaluate their writing and to have a business-like approach to class work activities. In one of the classes observed, a group of students was required to give brief and business-like feedback reports. The students were observed practising business writing skills and academic writing practices were not modelled in the classrooms. Figure 4.6 summarises the findings with regard to the level of interaction across the four classrooms.

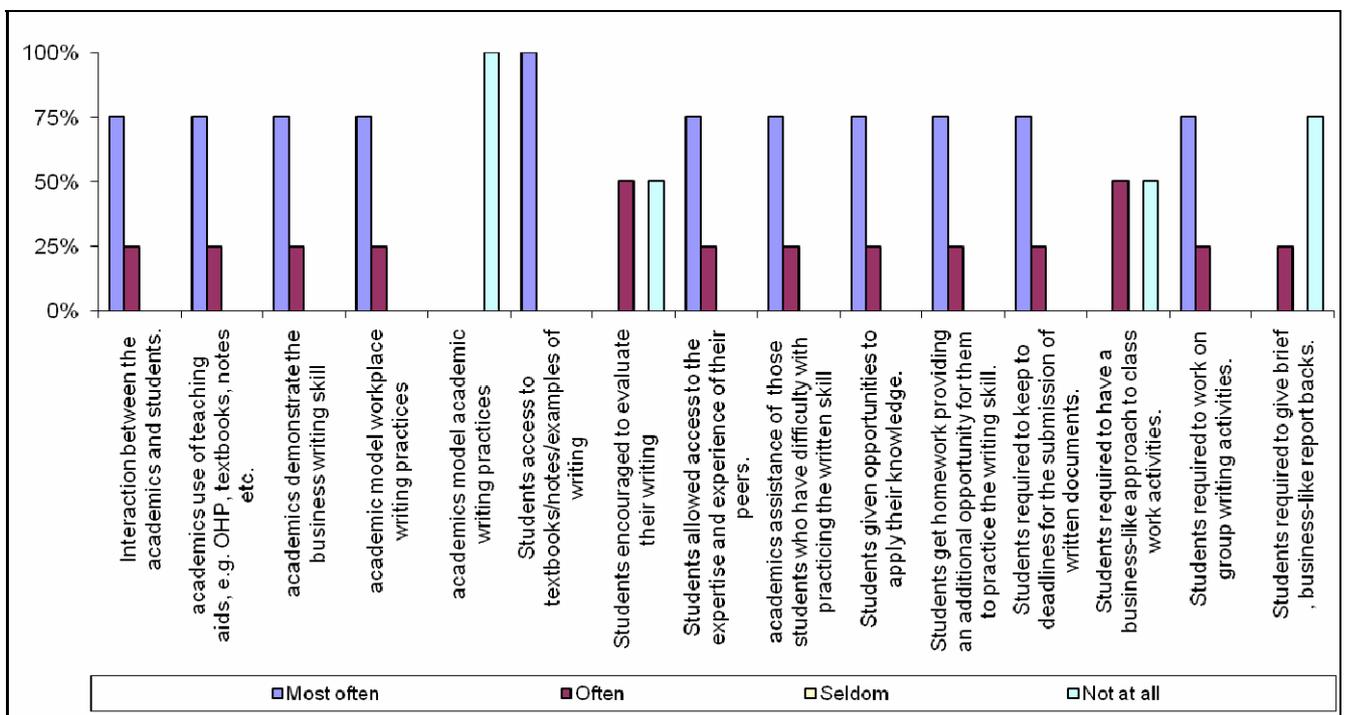


Figure 4.6: Classroom observations: levels of interaction

#### 4.4.2 Students as writers: keen classroom participants

The students observed were attentive listeners and asked questions. They were polite in their interactions with academics and each other, and took all the writing tasks given to them very seriously. They asked questions to gain clarity on group and individual writing tasks. Figure 4.7 is an example of an individual task on meeting correspondence given to a group of 1<sup>st</sup> year students for homework.

In an attempt to simulate workplace writing practices, the academic staff utilise group and peer work in the classroom. Research shows that much workplace writing is interactive and that most writers at work interact during the drafting and revising processes (Couture & Rymer, 1989; Walters, Hunter & Giddens, 2007).

**BOARDSIDE STAFF CLUB**

NOTICE TO ALL MEMBERS

Please take note of a special general meeting of members of this club to be held in the staff room on Wednesday, 20 November 2007 at 13:00.

The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the end of the year staff party.

T Jones

T. JONES  
SECRETARY

PO Box 15  
Cape Town  
2000  
Tel: (021) 458 7648

AGENDA

1. Opening and welcome
2. Attendance register
3. Apologies
4. End of the year staff party
5. Closure

**Task:** You are the secretary of the club. Write the minutes of this meeting. (12)  
Name of company: 1 Heading (4 X ½) = 2 Minutes: 6 Format and language : 3

**Figure 4.7: Individual task and homework for 1<sup>st</sup> year students**

Students were working individually and in groups and were producing meeting correspondence or reports according to the class work they had been assigned by the academic staff. They were producing the business writing without the use of 'lesser' genres, such as memoranda or agenda items sent by e-mail which would be the practice in the workplace. A 'genre ecology' includes the interrelated groups of genres and lesser genres, such as e-mails, memoranda and other texts which would be drawn on in the production of a financial report or the notice of a general meeting (Spinuzzi & Zachry, 2000). This allows people to accomplish complex objectives, but in HE this is generally not

the practice where students are expected to produce professional documentation without the support of additional texts.

#### 4.4.3 Genres of writing: abstract and decontextualised writing

The 1<sup>st</sup> year groups observed were mainly busy with notice, agenda and minute writing. The academics dealt with notice and agenda in a generalised way, after which students were given examples of how to formulate the minutes of a meeting. The 2<sup>nd</sup> year groups were observed being taught report writing skills in a similar way. They had been exposed to the writing of progress reports in a previous period. The academic reminded students of the principles of report writing and demonstrated the format for progress reports on the white board. The students were then given the hand-out of a report writing exercise (refer to Figure 4.8) to discuss in groups. The task required that they referred to their textbooks and other source documents on report writing for the generic format of progress reports. They were then given time to plan and compose a draft of the progress report. The academic was observed assisting those students who needed clarity on the exercise. Students were given time to work in their groups on composing the draft and at the end of the lesson the academic requested that students complete the draft for homework.

It is often difficult for students to link abstract generalisations to practice (Ryan, Toohey & Hughes, 1996). Piaget (1985) described two processes used by the individual when attempting to integrate new knowledge: assimilation and accommodation. Both of these processes are used throughout life as the person learns in an increasingly complex manner. Assimilation is the process of using or transforming the environment so that it can be placed in pre-existing cognitive structures. Accommodation is the process of changing cognitive structures in order to accept something from the environment. Both processes are used simultaneously and alternately throughout life (Piaget, 1985).

An example of assimilation would be when an OMT student uses a personal letter or e-mail writing schema when attempting to write a business letter. An example of accommodation would be when the student needs to modify his or her letter-writing schema, developed earlier, to one that would be successful in the academic context. Spinuzzi and Zachry (2000) point out that if students are only presented with concrete examples of final documents, and the process of developing them remains obscure, it will be difficult for students to develop the relevant cognitive schema. As schema become increasingly more complex (i.e., responsible for more complex behaviours) they are termed 'structures'. As cognitive structures become more complex (in moving from the 'concrete operational stage' to the 'formal operational stage'), they tend to become organised from general to specific. However, for novices in a discipline, it is easier to learn from concrete, specific examples, and then to extract generalisations (Sadler, 1998).

**QUESTION 1: REPORT WRITING****[20]**

Use the information given in the following scenario to write a progress report of a business trip that you are arranging for the General Manager and the Head of the Finance Department (HOD).

**SCENARIO**

**Name of company:** Khanyisa Imports  
**Nature of business:** Importing ethnic clothing and fabric (material) from Nigeria  
**Your position:** Personal Assistant to the General Manager

The General Manager, Ms Khanyi Mzo, and the HOD of the Finance Department, Mr Johan Brink, will be visiting Lagos, Nigeria from 20 to 25 November 2007 in order to discuss a possible merger with a Nigerian clothing company, The Ethnic Look. While they are in Lagos they intend to visit two other companies with the intention of forging links for future trade expansion in the import/export business. You have been tasked with planning this business trip.

**WHAT YOU SHOULD DO:**

It is 7 November 2007 and Ms Mzo has asked you for a progress report on the arrangements for the business trip. Arrange the details given below into tasks that have been completed, tasks currently being attended to and tasks to be completed, then write a full progress report in the form of a memorandum. You should submit the report by 9 November 2007.

NOTE: THE TASKS BELOW ARE NOT GIVEN IN ANY PARTICULAR ORDER

- Flight reservations/bookings – South African Airways
 

Departing:	SAA: CT-JHB	20 Nov - 08:00 Flight SA 321
	SAA: JHB-Lagos	20 Nov - 12:00 Flight SA 53
Return Flights:	SAA: Lagos-JHB	25 Nov - 20:00 Flight SA 51
	SAA: JHB-CT	26 Nov - 07:00 Flight SA 354
	Arriving CT:	26 Nov - 09:00
- Arrange for payment of flights
- Enquire about visa requirements
- Enquire about inoculations
- Arrange foreign currency for allowance while in Nigeria
- Arrange accommodation – Holiday Inn / 5 nights / single rooms
- Send e-mails to arrange a visit to two other companies, African Traders and Materials for Africa
- Arrange car hire with Avis Care Rental
- Prepare an itinerary
- Complete PowerPoint slides for the GM's presentation to the different companies
- Apply for visas
- Confirm visits to the three companies, giving dates and time of visits
- Make appointment with GM to hand over documentation

**MARK ALLOCATION:**

Arrangement of tasks, content and structure:	10
Format:	3
Language usage:	7

**Figure 4.8: Hand-out of report writing exercise**

Sadler (1998), following Piaget's stages, argues that new knowledge should be built from that which is already known and understood by students. Analyses of classroom language, on the other hand, reveal that academics, as members of subject specific knowledge communities, tend to take general-to-specific cognitive structures for granted (Northedge, 2003). As a result, they lock students out of subject specific discourses.

#### 4.4.4 The audience and purpose of writing: opportunities to practise

The 'assumed' purpose for students' business writings in the communication classrooms was to provide them with opportunities to practise the documentation required for the taking of minutes and the writing of reports in simulated workplace situations. The real purpose for students' business writing in HE is to meet the requirements of the curricula and the assessors. The 1<sup>st</sup> year Communication students were occupied with the writing of a notice and agenda and the formulation of minutes of a meeting. The 2<sup>nd</sup> year students were occupied with writing a progress report. These genres are essential business writing types that are utilised in the workplace and students are given opportunities to practise these skills in the classrooms.

The real audiences of students' business writing in classroom exercises of simulated workplace situations are the academic staff, but the simulated audiences are the readers of the business documentation in the workplace.

The writer and audience interactions in the teaching situation of the HE context allow the academic staff to model and instruct the students on the production of business writing. This is unique to the HE context where the students write for the purpose of exhibiting their knowledge to academics about a subject, but in the workplace the writer is the authority and writes to convey information to an audience who requires the information. This may account for the difficulties experienced by students in identifying the audiences of the business writing they produce in the simulated workplace situations in the classrooms (Paretti, 2006).

#### **4.5 Data from interviews with academic staff**

This section discusses the findings of the interviews conducted with three academic staff. The findings from the interviews will be discussed according to the contexts of writing, the students as writers, the genres of writing and the audience and purposes of writing.

##### 4.5.1 Contexts of writing: language or communication?

The three academic staff revealed the need for additional support for both the students and the academic staff. The academic staff teaching Communication 1 & 11 courses were clear that they were not language teachers, that is, they do not believe it is their role to teach basic grammar or spelling. For example, 'I am not a language teacher...I am a communication lecturer' (A2). Grammar and spelling are not part of the official curriculum. The interviewees felt that there was a need to address students' language development generally across the OMT programme. While communication lecturers do attempt to assist those students with language difficulties, they saw their roles as communication academics, that is, to teach elements of business style, communication practices and so on. They recognised that students required additional support in terms of their language development

in order for them to learn about business communication in English. The academics claimed that the various support structures on the campuses (e.g., the Writing Centre and writing tutors) were necessary to enable the OMT programme academics to facilitate learning. Learning in subject areas cannot occur without teaching students to communicate their thoughts and abilities through the English language (Heugh, 2007).

At Campus Z the academic staff made use of tutors as well as the Writing Centre which aims to develop individual student academic writing skills by coaching and guiding those students with writing problems. An academic claimed that 'the Writing Centre assists with teaching students assignment writing skills' (A1). At Campus Y additional attention is given to students with difficulties as the classes are smaller. Campus X has an additional period allocated to the Communication 1 and 11 courses which is utilised for tutorials. The communication academic at Campus X does not have the benefit of the Writing Centre on the premises and has to rely on tutor support to assist with students who have difficulties with academic and business writing.

#### *Methods of teaching*

Academic staff attempt to model academic writing skills by ensuring that all hand-outs, notes, exercises and assessments are academically correct and include references and bibliographies. Examples of referencing skills are demonstrated on the white boards and feedback given on worksheets to assist students when they are experiencing problems with these skills. These functions are unique to the HE context where the use of academic writing skills is a necessity. An academic stated that 'academic skills are not modelled throughout all subjects and language is not communication and therefore all academic staff should teach these skills' (A2). The communication academics were concerned about the perception that it was solely their responsibility to assist students with language difficulties and with the acquiring of academic skills. All the courses of the OMT programme require that students write assignments in English, do research, and reference their sources. The interviewees therefore felt that it was the role of each academic to correct language errors within their discipline and to ensure that students apply academic writing skills correctly.

The ways in which the academic staff believed that they modelled business writing skills included the following methods: the modelling of these skills on the white board, on posters in the classrooms, the encouraging of students to think and behave like office professionals by requiring them to file their assessed writing documentations, the modelling of the correct requirements on worksheets and feedback reports to students, the augmenting of lecturing materials with current texts, readings and articles, and the requirement of presentations by students on business writing skills which would take place at the culmination of projects.

### *Academic support*

At Campus Z the results of the students are assessed after the first test period in March or April. Those students with language and writing problems are sent to the Writing Centre where they receive assistance with their problems. A mentoring system is also in place at Campus Z where, after the first test, each academic meets with those students who have not passed and discusses their problems. A plan of action is formulated in respect of each student to remedy the problems which have been identified. Students' results were monitored throughout the year to assess their progress after receiving remedial and academic support. This practice is in line with the new ideas that have developed concerning the main function of assessment. Assessment procedures are no longer seen only as a means for crediting students with recognised certificates, but also as a means for monitoring the progress of students and to direct them to remedial learning activities when needed (Dochy, Segers, & Sluijsmans, 1999). Assessment is therefore viewed as a tool for learning and not something which happens only at the end of a learning process (Boud & Falchikov, 2005).

#### 4.5.2 Students as writers: writers in need of support

According to the academic staff, most of the students experience difficulty with academic writing. Concerns were expressed with regard to the difficulty of teaching students academic writing skills such as assignment writing, referencing skills, summary writing, note taking and the avoidance of plagiarism. For example, 'the standard of students is very low and some students require a bridging course'(A1); 'students find referencing very difficult and are not used to thinking for themselves'(A2); and 'there is a vast range of those who are from excellent schooling systems and those who are not'(A3). These concerns have implications for the admission requirements of the programme (refer to section 1.4.1) which require that students enter the programme with HG English. Interviewees claimed that the student registration process assumed that, because students have passed HG English at the matric level, they possess the necessary levels of proficiency to meet the requirements of the OMT programme, but that this was not always evident with regard to essay writing where it was not uncommon for an essay to be full of errors.

Hand-outs, textbooks and worksheets are used by the academic staff to teach academic writing and to provide students with opportunities to exercise these skills.

All the academic staff mentioned their concerns about the standard of the business writing skills of the students, especially the 1<sup>st</sup> year students. Students experienced difficulties with language, spelling and with the structuring of paragraphs. Academics also claimed that 'students do not take notes in class' (A3) and 'they do not practise their writing skills when provided with opportunities to do so' (A2). They felt that additional support was needed to assist those students who had difficulties writing in English since the majority of the students of the OMT programme across the campuses are ESL

learners. This view is supported by the findings on student languages (refer to Figure 4.5) and the need for academic support since only 11, 49% of the students enrolled in the Communication 1 and 11 courses are English first language speakers. Nearly 50% of these students had been exposed to business writing and had some part-time work experience (refer to Table 4.5), but many students had not had this exposure and required additional support.

The students are also thought to ‘compartmentalise their learning and do not transfer what is learned about academic and business writing in the communication classroom to the other subjects where they are also required to produce these writings’(A3). It was also felt that students at a tertiary level should not be spoon-fed, but encouraged to participate in the learning process by doing research and being prepared to work independently.

Research shows that successful writers need subject matter knowledge as they need to know the topic they are dealing with, the conventions of writing in general and the discourse-specific moves they can make in a given genre (Walters, Hunter & Giddens, 2007). They should have knowledge of the writing process and have a supply of strategies for exploring the rhetorical problem, for generating ideas, for adapting to the reader and monitoring their own writing processes (Kellog, 2001; Walters, Hunter & Giddens, 2007). Finally, they should know what their own strategies and options are for rhetorical problem-solving and must consider how to improve on past writing-related tasks (Flower, 1989; Walters, Hunter & Giddens, 2007).

#### 4.5.3 Genres of writing: keeping up-to-date

The materials used by the academic staff to teach business writing skills included: textbooks, hand-outs of the examples of different letter formats, slides of successful writing efforts of prior students, case-studies and scenarios, overhead projector slides, and PowerPoint presentations. Students are encouraged to bring academics relevant articles from newspapers and magazines which are then utilised for case-studies. Students are also required to ‘e-mail their academic staff in order to provide authentic examples of the workplace requirements and all assignments and essays must be typed on the computer’ (A3). The textbooks which have been written by experts in the fields of business communication are error-free and model good communication practices.

Attempts made by academic staff to remain current on the latest business writing practices included: sitting in on lectures at other HE sites, participating in presenting courses for industry, attending workshops presented by industry, and obtaining feedback from members of the business world at the annual Advisory Committee meetings. Members of the business world employ OMT students in order to do their experiential training. In addition, the ‘learner guides are sent out to these members of the business world for their input on the content of the Communication 1 and 11 courses’ (A2). While it is

impossible for academic staff to teach the range of situations that turn up in business and the professions (Selzer, 1989; Jeong, Taylor & Chi, 2000), academic staff try, by means of innovative methods and by modelling business writing skills in the classroom, to prepare students for the workplace.

#### *Electronic communication genres*

The academic staff all acknowledged that electronic communication skills are necessary for students to achieve success in the workplace. They explained that the OMT programme requires that students are proficient both in the theory and in the practice of information administration which they are required to study for three years (refer to section 4.2.3). Students are required to produce business writing for the communication courses by using the computer for assignments and projects. Students are required to do PowerPoint presentations and to prepare and present slides on an overhead projector and to do e-mailing.

The need for SMSs in business is recognised, but not approved of by the academic staff unless students use conventional English language and not ‘SMS speak’ (A2) and ‘it is not professional when students don’t spell correctly and it must be brief’ (A1). One of the academic staff was opposed to the idea of using SMSs in business because ‘students use mixed language and now many students with poor language skills are not improving and cannot spell’ (A3).

#### 4.5.4 The audience and purpose: preparing for the workplace

The academic staff were aware of the difficulties of teaching business writing in the academic context and it was stated that ‘other academic staff should refer to what is taught in the Communication 1 and 11 courses when teaching business writing skills’ (A3). The emphasis on academic and business writing skills across the subjects of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year courses is intended to provide students with additional opportunities to practise and assist them to transfer the knowledge from the communication course to other subjects and ultimately to the workplace.

### **4.6 Data from students’ assessments and moderators’ reports**

The outcomes of students’ summative tests for writing and the moderators’ reviews of the outcomes of students’ learning are discussed in this section.

#### 4.6.1 Contexts of writing: formative, continuous and summative assessment

The HE sites provide the context for the assessment of academic and business writing skills for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students. Formative assessment provides feedback to the academic and the student. It occurs during a lesson or unit and provides opportunities for corrective actions to enhance learning. Summative assessments are assessments undertaken at the end of a learning period or unit of study.

The academics document students' performance after the completion of a unit or learning period. Assessment is therefore a continuous process that allows students to be assessed on their performance throughout the year and provides them with additional opportunities to improve their performances.

1<sup>st</sup> year students who enrol in January are given until the end of February to acquire computer skills as thereafter all business writing had to be produced on the computer. Students are also given opportunities to work in groups and to assess each other's work in peer review exercises. 1<sup>st</sup> year students are required to do field work at any organisation of their choosing during the June vacation period and to write a report of their findings, which is assessed. Field research is another method of consolidating classroom experience and providing students with opportunities for writing beyond the classroom and to do more than master conventions and correctness (Selzer, 1989; Couture & Rymer, 1989; Lauerman, 1989).

In the past, 2<sup>nd</sup> year students were also given opportunities to do field work for an assignment on report writing skills and were required to visit workplace sites, such as banks, retailers and so on and to undertake observations, interviews and hand out surveys. During 2007 the 2<sup>nd</sup> year students were required to prepare all the documentation for the planning and executing of a seminar. Figure 4.4 is an example of the business correspondence assignment for this seminar and students organise and plan a seminar which is carried out later in the year. Students generally perform better during the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of their studies as they have been required to communicate in English both orally and in writing during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year for all the subjects of the OMT programme.

#### 4.6.2 Students as writers: outcomes of learning

The percentages of the Communication 1 and 11 students who passed each of three summative 2 hour tests written during 2007 are shown in Table 4.8. The 1<sup>st</sup> year students did not do well in the first test (refer to Appendix G) which required students to write a paragraph, a facsimile, correct a business letter and demonstrate their referencing skills. The marks for the second test (refer to Appendix H) appear to be more favourable for 1<sup>st</sup> year students as this test required students to answer mainly theoretical questions with one question requiring them to draw up a memorandum. Thus it would seem that the 1<sup>st</sup> year students are able to perform better in a theoretical context rather than in one that requires them to apply their skills and understanding to practical tasks. The percentage pass rates show that it was mainly the 1<sup>st</sup> year part-time students of campus Z who experienced difficulties with the third test (refer to Appendix I). This test required students to write a notice and an agenda, a section of the minutes of a meeting, a covering letter in response to an advertisement for a job and a speech outline.

**Table 4.8: Percentages of summative tests**

Campus	Level	1 <sup>st</sup> TEST	2 <sup>nd</sup> TEST	3 <sup>rd</sup> TEST	Overall pass rates for 2007
Campus X	1 <sup>st</sup> FT	49%	58%	59%	70%
Campus Y	1 <sup>st</sup> FT	48%	52%	65%	81%
Campus Z	1 <sup>st</sup> FT	50 %	69%	67%	85%
Campus Z	1 <sup>st</sup> PT	47%	53%	46%	69%
Campus X	2 <sup>nd</sup> FT	80%	63%	90%	93%
Campus Y	2 <sup>nd</sup> FT	79%	57%	92%	96%
Campus Z	2 <sup>nd</sup> FT	92%	60%	66%	96%
Campus Z	2 <sup>nd</sup> PT	72%	33%	83%	94%

Figure 4.9 below is an example of sections of test 3 for 1<sup>st</sup> year students.

<b>QUESTION 1</b>	<b>(10 MARKS)</b>
<p><b>FASHIONISTA</b> will be having their monthly management meeting to discuss the following new business agenda items: problems in customer care, professionalism and punctuality. Draw up the notice and agenda for this meeting.</p>	
	Format and Language: 3
	Notice (6 X ½) 3
	Agenda (8 X ½) 4
	<b>Total (10)</b>
<b>QUESTION 2</b>	<b>(12 MARKS)</b>
<p><b>FASHIONISTA</b> has a monthly management meeting to discuss any problems. The only three items placed on the agenda for this month's meeting are: problems experienced in the customer care department, professionalism and punctuality. <b>Write the minutes for these three items only.</b> Include the heading for the minutes for the meeting.</p>	
<p>Format and Language: 3 Name of Company: 1 Heading (4 X ½) = 2 Minutes (3 X 2) = 6</p>	
	<b>Total (12)</b>

**Figure 4.9: Example of section of test 3 for 1<sup>st</sup> year students**

Attempts were made to make use of authentic workplace examples for the testing of business writing skills, but assessment requirements place constraints on how questions are constructed. Question 2 of this test is an example of the constraints of the assessment process where students are only required to write three items of the minutes. The assessment process requires that students need to be tested on as many aspects as possible of the curriculum under discussion, often at the expense of realistic content.

The findings show that the 2<sup>nd</sup> year students performed fairly well in the 1<sup>st</sup> test (refer to Appendix J) which comprised questions requiring the writing of business documents, namely, a memorandum and an agenda and minutes including an action column. The students did not do as well in the 2<sup>nd</sup> test (refer to Appendix K), particularly the part-time students, as this test was based on the theoretical aspects of their studies, namely, organisational communication, small group communication and professional self-development. The students performed better in their 3<sup>rd</sup> test (refer to Appendix L) which required that they write a report and answer questions on job correspondence.

### *Moderators' reports*

The moderators' comments regarding aspects in which students performed unsatisfactorily for the Communication 1 tests were: for test 1 (refer to Appendix G) 'the writing of paragraphs and of the fax and students struggled with academic literacy skills and assignment writing. Many students tend to conflate Communication 1 with high school English and do not put in the effort' (M1), for test 2 (refer to Appendix H) 'multiple-choice questions, the writing of memorandum and generally students do not read well' (M2), and for test 3 (refer to Appendix I) 'students had difficulty in writing the comprehensive covering letter and minute writing. This task required that students included information given, as well as own creativity so as to be persuasive in securing an interview' (M3).

The moderator's comments on the aspects which were unsatisfactorily answered for Communication 11 tests were: for test 1 (refer to Appendix J) 'those who did not do well were unprepared to write the test. The questions were based on recall and application of knowledge' (M4), for test 2 (refer to Appendix K) 'those who did not do well were unprepared and did not study for this test' (M5), and for test 3 (refer to Appendix L) 'students were required to write a report and most students found this difficult' (M6).

The moderators' comments in relation to the students' evaluation of the business writing course (refer to Table 4.1) show that while more than 90% of the Communication 1 and 11 students realise the importance of business writing skills for the workplace, some students did not prepare adequately for the tests. In other instances students did not put in the necessary effort because they assumed that the required standard is similar to that of high school English. Poor attendance impacts negatively on performance and as a result attempts are made to ensure that students attend classes and tutorials regularly (refer to section 4.2.2).

The overall pass rates (refer to Table 4.8) are calculated by combining the marks for tests, assignments, oral presentations and continuous class work. Figure 4.10 shows the report by the academic staff on the pass rate of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year full time students.

#### 4.6.3 Genres of writing: case-studies and scenarios

Students were given case-studies and workplace scenarios which allowed them to practise their business writing skills. The communication academics felt that they had made a number of attempts to provide the students with opportunities to succeed and to learn to their full potential. These included opportunities to practise academic and business writing skills in the classrooms and to submit drafts for assessment prior to the final submission of assignments and class projects. Interviewees claimed that students received regular feedback on their performances and that they made attempts to keep

these exercises, case-studies and assignments as authentic as possible. Figure 4.11 is an example of an assessment exercise for 1<sup>st</sup> year students.

Research shows that the development of expert performance in both physical and cognitive task domains requires deliberate practice. The development of expertise in writing skills depends upon the deliberate practice of these skills to improve performance. Feedback on performances and opportunities for the improvement of performance are requirements for the development of expert performance (Kellogg, 2008).

<b>REPORT: COMMUNICATION 11 2007</b>			
<b>2007</b>	<b>Campus X</b>	<b>Campus Y</b>	<b>Campus Z</b>
REGISTERED STUDENTS BEGIN 2007	46	24	74 (FT)
FORMAL CANCELLATIONS		1	2 (FT)
STUDENTS NOT RETURN 2 <sup>ND</sup> SEMESTER	3		3 (FT)
STUDENTS WHO WROTE ASSESSMENTS	43	23	69 (FT)
OVERALL PASS RATES	93%	96%	96% (FT)

**ACADEMIC STAFF' COMMENTS: Possible reasons for success rate above 90%**

In the first semester about half the student number just made the grade at Campus X. The students who gained 80% and 90 % gained distinctions in most of their other subjects as well.

The majority of the students fall between the 50% and 60% bracket for both semesters which indicates an average performance. Given that the weightings for the assessments were high because of the semester courses, students worked really hard to pass each assessment. The process-writing approach was used for research assignments where students were assisted with structure, content and language usage before the final assignment was submitted. Marks were allocated as a formative assessment for the first draft. The question uppermost is about language usage – a small portion of every assessment is allocated to language usage as there are many other components of writing and communication skills that are assessed.

Students were required to do 2 presentations per semester, contributing 20% towards the final semester mark of 100%. This contributed to a pass percentage for most students who might have been borderline cases. Having smaller groups means that students have the advantage of being monitored very closely so that individual students can receive targeted assistance as required. Campus Y also has smaller groups and students benefited from the individual attention.

At Campus Z the Communication 11 syllabus is based on continuous evaluation and students have numerous opportunities to improve on their work. The Communication 11 syllabus is also an expansion on the work covered during Communication 1 and students are therefore familiar with what is expected of them.

Students' English language skills usually improved after the first year and they also work much harder during the second year of their communication studies.

**Figure 4.10: Report for Communication 11**

### ASSESSMENT QUESTION: MEMO WRITING

Imagine that you are in a management position at your place of work. You have noticed that there are conflict and tension among the different cultures employed in your department. You have now organised a workshop in diversity management. You have also invited, as facilitator, Mr Brian Tanga, an expert in the field.

Write a MEMO to your staff motivating them to attend the workshop.

Format (5):	-½ per error or omission	
Content (7):	Opening paragraph outlining problems	(1)
	Motivating need for attending	(2)
	Details of time, date, venue	(3)
	RSVP / request for feedback	(1)
Language use (3)		
Total:	15	

**Figure 4.11: Assessment question: memo writing**

#### 4.6.4 The audience and purpose: assessment and moderation

The ‘assumed’ purpose for students’ business writing in HE is to practise and acquire the business writing skills required for their entry to the workplace, but the real purpose for students’ business writing in HE is to meet the requirements of the curricula and the assessors. The simulated audiences of students’ business writing in classroom exercises of simulated workplace situations are the readers of the business documentation in the workplace. However, the real audiences of students’ business writings of the classroom exercises, tests and assignments are the assessors.

There is an additional audience for assessment tasks, namely, the moderators whose role it is to moderate the assessment practices of the HE academics. In the context of the communication courses the moderators are internal to the institution, that is, other communication academics. The Communication 1 and 11 academic staff rotate the tasks of examiners and moderators of students’ assessments.

The main goal of HE is no longer merely to make students knowledgeable within a certain area of study, but to meet the needs of society where the increasing need for life-long learning, reflective thinking, the capacity to evaluate oneself and problem-solving are the changing goals of HE institutions. Assessment therefore will have to be in harmony with these needs and will have to be more than the measurement of the students’ reproduction of knowledge opportunities within HE (Dochy, Segers & Sluijsmans, 1999; Boud & Falchikov, 2005). The findings show that many students find it difficult to think creatively and to prepare themselves for assessments which require more than the reproduction of knowledge.

## **4.7 Conclusion**

This section summarises the findings of the HE data across the categories of 1) context, 2) writing abilities of the students, 3) genres identified and 4) audience and purpose of writing.

### 4.7.1 Contexts of writing

The HE context is a context of learning that focuses on the exchange of information for the purpose of knowledge acquisition. The HE context consists of a discourse community comprising academics and students. The levels of interaction in this community are between academics who are primarily involved in teaching and the students who are the learners. The HE context attempts to simulate the workplace for the purpose of preparing students to enter the business world. Academics teach writing skills in the communication course, but they are not language teachers. They demonstrate and model workplace genres and provide opportunities for students to write individually and to collaborate on producing writing in the classrooms. In the HE context, students produce writing for formative, continuous and summative assessment purposes.

Academic staff attempt to simulate workplace writing and practices, but in this academic setting business writing is often ‘pedagogized’ for learning purposes. The question is whether students are able to transfer the ‘pedagogized’ business writing skills to the workplace.

### 4.7.2 Students as writers

Students as writers in the HE context are in the process of developing the basic skills in business writing genres. Students are keen participants in the classrooms where they practise the generic business writing genres that they would be required to use when they enter the workplace. Most of the students undertaking 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year studies in communication are ESL learners. Academics consider the writing of the students and especially the 1<sup>st</sup> year students, ‘to be weak’ (A1) and have noted that they experience difficulties, such as ‘writing one long run of sentences’ (A3) and ‘cannot think for themselves’(A3). These students are in need of additional support and mentoring.

Students are required to produce business writing documentation without the aid of supporting documents and are often presented with concrete examples of final documents. The process of developing these texts remains obscure for the students (Spinuzzi & Zachry, 2000), which tends to become an academic exercise that is decontextualised from the body of knowledge and practices that they are trying to develop (Boud & Falchikov, 2006).

The majority of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students believe that they have the ability to produce business writing in the workplace. The students believe that the business writing in which they have participated in the HE context is necessary for them to enter the workplace because: ‘in the business world everything is

about business correspondence and business writing skills' (x44). The assessment results and moderators' reviews show that students generally perform better during the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of their studies. Research shows that when students evaluate their performance positively, they are encouraged to set themselves higher goals and that students become better writers by learning how to evaluate their writing performance (Ross & Rolheiser, 1992; Ross, Rolheiser & Hogaboam-Gray, 1998).

#### 4.7.3 Genres of writing

The communication curriculum includes the study of academic, business writing and electronic communication genres. The focus is on the business writing genres which students are required to study and practise in preparation for their entry into the workplace. Many of the students have had part-time work experience and almost half had been exposed to business writing skills prior to their entry into the HE environment. Generic formats of business writing genres are taught and academics make use of numerous methods to keep up-to-date with workplace practices, such as case-studies, scenarios, newspaper articles and so on. Differentiations in the extent of practice which 1<sup>st</sup> year Communication students receive in academic and business writing skills hold implications for both the students and academic staff as these skills are expanded on during the 2<sup>nd</sup> year. The attainment of superior writing skills depends on the degree of repeated practice (Johnstone, Ashbaugh & Warfield, 2002) to which students are exposed.

Students are also required to become proficient in the use of the electronic communication genres and to produce all projects and assignments by using the computer. In preparation for the workplace, students study information technology and learn how to use it in 'text-centered interactions' to generate and receive e-mails (Geisler, Bazerman, Doheny-Farina, Gurak, Haas, Johnson-Eilola, Kaufer, Lunsford, Miller, Winsor & Yates, 2001: 270) and multiple texts (Spinuzzi & Zachry, 2000).

#### 4.7.4 The audience and purposes of writing

In the HE context students are required to become competent in the business writing genres which they will be required to produce when they enter the workplace. The real audiences of the students' writings are the academics and assessors. The writings of students are practised and produced in order to meet the course requirements and to demonstrate their knowledge to the academics and assessors. The simulated audiences of students' business writings are the workplace audiences, namely, the customers, clients and staff of the companies by whom they are imagined to be employed. The simulated purposes of students' business writings are for the exchange of information with the audiences of the companies by whom they would be employed.

In the next chapter, the contexts, writers, genres, audience and purposes within the workplace are examined.

## **CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA AT THE WORKPLACE**

Within work sites that engage in knowledge work, newcomers have particular difficulty acquiring knowledge because knowledge keeps changing. Newcomers have to assimilate currently accepted knowledge while remaining open to learning and even generating new knowledge (Winsor, 2001: 5).

### **5.1 Introduction**

Chapter five sets out the findings of the research undertaken at the workplace sites where novice employees were engaged in experiential training. The findings are based on the documentary data, the data from interviews with the novice employees, the data from workplace observations and the data obtained from interviews with the employers. The data are presented under the headings of the theoretical model of written communication developed from the literature (refer to section 2.5), namely: 1) the contexts of writing, 2) students as writers, 3) genres of writing and 4) the audience and purpose of the writing. These categories together with themes drawn from the research findings comprise the sub-headings under which the research findings are discussed.

The documentary data include the minutes and feedback from Advisory Committee meetings, the feedback reports from employers regarding novice employees who completed their experiential training during 2007 and the documentation from the workplace.

### **5.2 Documentary data from Advisory Committee meetings**

Advisory Committee meetings are usually held annually or when necessary. They are usually called by the Co-operative Education<sup>1</sup> academic staff who co-ordinate and organise the experiential training component of the OMT programme. The Co-operative Education academic staff establish contact with the employers who are willing to mentor the novice employees by offering them positions for six months at their companies. The Co-operative Education academic staff also lecture 2<sup>nd</sup> year students for 2 periods of 45 minutes per period per week for six months before they embark on their experiential training in order to prepare them for the workplace. The employers of the novice employees and the academic staff are invited to attend Advisory Committee meetings.

The purpose of the meeting is to receive feedback from employers on the work placement performances of students as novice employees and for academic staff to offer their insights and advice with regard to academic matters.

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<sup>1</sup> In the South African context, co-operative education refers to a form of experiential learning in which senior students are placed at relevant work sites for a period of time, usually 3 – 6 months.

This data comprise minutes of the Advisory Committee Meetings held at Campus Z, on 19 March 2003 and 14 October 2005. A feedback report (rather than formal minutes) was provided by the Head of Department of the OMT programme for the meeting held on 3 April 2007.

#### 5.2.1 Contexts of writing: legal implications

Novice employees had difficulty making the transition from HE to the workplace. At the 2007 meeting it was mentioned that novice employees should ‘immediately switch from viewing themselves as students and see themselves (sic) as employees of the organisation’ (HOD, 3 April 2007).

The employers pointed out that employees work with data, much of which is confidential, such as financial data and data relating to human resources issues. It is therefore necessary for the students-as-novice employees to be aware of the legal requirements that will govern their work. This point is captured in the extract of the minutes below:

[Employer A] asked if the students are taught the Archives Act as he mentioned that students don’t know about that specific Act, why we need to keep records in archives, etc. [Employer B] mentioned that Access to Information Act should also be taught as students sometimes cannot distinguish between confidential documents and ordinary documents. She also mentioned that these students need to be aware of the Act and they should at least have a basic knowledge of the Act. [Staff member A] mentioned that those Acts are being covered in their BTech year, but they will bring it into the second year of study (Minutes of Advisory Committee meeting, 2005).

It was recognised that novice employees required support and that ‘when students are being recruited in the first week they get a mentor assigned to them’ (Employer C, Minutes of Advisory Committee meeting 2003) and that it ‘would help if employers take the students on an induction programme’ (Employer D, Minutes of Advisory Committee meeting, 2003).

#### 5.2.2 Novice employees as writers: need for soft skills

The minutes of the meeting of 2003 reflect that the novice employees had progressed after three months in the workplace and that in many instances ‘the student did a superb job’ (Employer E, Minutes of Advisory Committee meeting, 2003). Some of the novice employees lacked confidence, but this was not the case at all the workplace sites. Novice OMT employees were reported to communicate better than the IT novice employees. The OMT students had communicated well in their interviews with the employers which were held prior to commencing their experiential training. At the 2005 meeting some novice employees were reported to need training in soft skills, such as time keeping and meeting due dates. Novice employees appear to have a ‘lot of knowledge’, but they ‘cannot put it into practice’ (Employer F, Minutes of Advisory Committee meeting, 2005). Some

novice employees had difficulty with thinking independently and with using their initiative and do not 'know what to order when the stationery runs out or the costs involved' (Employer G, Minutes of Advisory Committee meeting, 2003).

### 5.2.3 Genres of writing: etiquette and accuracy

In the workplace, there are several genres that bridge oral and written communication, such as taking messages from telephone calls, minute-taking at meetings and so on. The employers reported on the difficulties novice employees experienced with regard to etiquette and accuracy of the genres utilised in the workplace. While this research focuses on the written genres of novice employees, there is an overlap of the genres as reported by the employers.

It was reported at the 2003 meeting that the difficulties which some of the novice employees had experienced with business writing was with instruction taking as some of the novice employees did not take down important information correctly. At the 2005 meeting it was reported that while the novice employees produced good business letters and reports, they had difficulty with instruction taking. Instructions were not always carried out when it came to event planning as novice employees usually did not follow up on matters. At both meetings it was noted that novice employees had problems with minute taking and that 'students should be able to take constructive minutes or action minutes' (Employer E, Minutes of the Advisory Committee meeting, 2005).

The difficulties which novice employees had experienced with telephone skills and etiquette were discussed at both meetings. Figure 5.1 is the feedback report of the meeting of 2007 by the Head of Department, OMT, which highlighted similar issues to those which had been reported at the meetings of 2003 and 2005. This report was e-mailed to the academic staff of the OMT Department to ensure that the issues raised at the Advisory Committee meeting were addressed.

At all three meetings the issues of 'telephone techniques and etiquette', 'instruction taking' and 'follow through' were identified as problems being experienced by the novice employees. Although telephone techniques, instruction taking and listening skills form components of both Communication 1 and 11 course contents, it still appears that novice employees are unable to apply what is learned at the HE sites when entering the workplace. It would appear that the issue of knowledge transfer is relevant in this situation and this is supported by research (Singley & Anderson, 1989; Latour, 1999; Engel-Hills et al., 2005) as it describes the fact that the novice employees have difficulty in applying the knowledge learned and practised in HE once they get to the workplace.

I want to thank [Co-operative Education Academic staff member A] for arranging a splendid meeting with excellent documentation available and as always a great venue and food. Thanks ... for the work you do with employers and students alike.

Hence, it is a pleasure to report that the employers that attended this meeting were unanimous in their opinion that OMT students offer very good service and need very little extra training when they embark on positions in the workplace. Congratulations to all of you who do such a marvellous job on getting them ready for work.

However, I did ask for constructive criticism and the one aspect that was mentioned by all the employers is **telephone techniques and specifically telephone etiquette**. They mentioned that they can win or lose customers/clients through excellent or shoddy telephone etiquette. Another point they made was that we have to reinforce the **employee approach** rather than the **student approach** when students enter the workforce, i.e. students should immediately switch from viewing themselves (sic) as students and see themselves as employees of the organisation. Also, students need to know **to follow through** on any task, i.e. give immediate feedback to the employer on how things are progressing.

I think if we could all work **telephone etiquette** into our syllabi, we could make strides as far as this topic is concerned. It is not just about **how** students answer the phone, but **more about the conversation, directions, taking down of information, etc. that follow**.

Thanks again for your commitment to the work you do and to your students.

**Figure 5.1: Feedback report of meeting held on 3 April 2007**

#### 5.2.4 The audience and purpose: real audiences, 'high stakes' communication

The primary audiences for the novice employees are the customers and clients of the company at which they are employed. The purpose of novice employees' business writing in the workplace is to communicate and share information with customers and clients. This audience has real requirements, such as specific information – and they want to be addressed politely. Research on communication in the workplace shows that management professionals need to be aware of the audience as readers of their writing and to respond accordingly to these needs (Miller, Larsen & Gaitens, 1996). The office manager is often responsible for much of the client interaction and carries considerable responsibility. This communication could be described as 'high stakes' communication (Pardo, Salle, & Spencer, 1995).

The feedback report of the meeting of 2007 makes reference to the importance of telephone techniques and telephone etiquette that 'can win or lose customers/clients through excellent or shoddy telephone etiquette' (HOD, 3 April 2007).

A secondary audience comprises the employees' supervisors, senior staff and colleagues with whom they also communicate and share information. The writing of documents which provide a record of decisions taken, such as minutes of meetings, are considered in the workplace to be 'vitaly important' (Employer E, Minutes of the Advisory Committee meeting, 2005) as the senior staff and members of workplace committees rely on accurate records of meetings.

### **5.3 Feedback from the employers on the performance of novice employees**

Each employer or training provider was presented with a guide outlining the aims and criteria of the experiential training component of the OMT programme, as well as the learning expectations required from the employer. The employer was requested to ensure that the novice employees were exposed to the OMT activities indicated in the guide and to provide expert mentoring for the novice employees undertaking their experiential training. The feedback from the employers on the performance of novice employees was obtained from standard forms designed by the Co-operative Education academic at Campus Z, which had been given to the employers to complete at the end of the co-operative training period. Employers of the novice employees, who had completed the six months of experiential training during 2007, were requested to complete a Personal Skills Assessment Form (refer to Figure 3.1).

Campus X makes use of a similar model for the assessment of the experiential training components of the OMT programme, but until 2007 this had been undertaken by a number of the OMT academic staff. Since 2007 a Co-operative Education academic has been employed at Campus X to place and assess novice employees undertaking their experiential training. Campus X utilised a different assessment form comprising of different requirements for the assessment of the novice employees' progress in the workplace. The Co-operative Education academic based at Campus Z undertakes the placement and assessment of the novice employees of both Campus Y and Z. The Personal Skills Assessment forms of campus X were not available for the purpose of this research.

#### 5.3.1 Contexts of writing: the importance of a positive attitude

Novice employees were required to participate in the working environment in which they were placed and to carry out the oral and written communication duties assigned to them. The employers rated the students according to a series of contextual categories, as well as their levels of skill. These included the rating of novice employees' degree of interest, enthusiasm and eagerness to tackle new work, their ability to work unsupervised, their perseverance and decision making skills. The general appearance and neatness of novice employees were also rated as well as their attendance, punctuality and adaptability to the work environment. The Personal Skills Assessment form did not provide a category for employers' comments, but a few employers made comments at the bottom of the form. One employer commented that the novice employee 'was able to integrate into our department and systems with great enthusiasm' (PE6).

In the contextual rating, the average results of the employers' ratings of 68 novice employees are shown in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1: Students' ability to adapt to the workplace context**

Degree of Interest in Work : Enthusiasm and eagerness to tackle new work	80%
Independent Work Procedure : Ability to work unsupervised	79%
Perseverance : When faced with difficulties in the execution of tasks	78%
Decision making in crisis situation	73%
General appearance and neatness : Adhering to appropriate dress code	87%
Attendance and punctuality: Work in terms of employment contract and adhering to required working times	85%
Adaptability to Work Environment	82%

The percentages reflect that, at the end of the six months of experiential training, the average ratings are: 80% for the novice employees' degree of enthusiasm and eagerness to tackle new work, 82% to adapt to the work environment, 87% for the novice employees' adherence to an appropriate dress code, and 85% for attendance and punctuality. These ratings are high and reflect that novice employees adapted fairly well to the work environment. The average percentage ratings are also fairly high for the novice employees' abilities for independent work procedures and perseverance. The lowest average percentage ratings are 73% for decision making in crisis situations. This would imply that after six months novice employees are not yet fully competent to deal with crisis situations and require more experience in this regard.

### 5.3.2 Novice employees as writers: ESL speakers with good writing skills

The Personal Skills Assessment forms also assessed verbal and written communication skills of novice employees, including their successful interpretation and completion of tasks. Of the 68 novice employees who completed their experiential training during 2007, only 20 were English first language speakers. Table 5.2 shows the average percentages of the 68 novice employees' assessment results for verbal and written communication and the successful interpretation and completion of tasks components of the Personal Skills Assessment forms.

**Table 5.2: Personal skills assessment results**

Verbal Communication : Use of language when communicating with others	76%
Successful interpretation and completion of tasks	82%
Written Communication : Expression in the written word	75%

The average percentage rating of the novice employees' abilities to successfully interpret and complete tasks is 82%. This rating is high considering that the majority of novice employees were ESL speakers. The ratings are 76% for verbal communication and 75% for written communication. These ratings are also high for ESL communicators and show that novice employees performed well in the execution of verbal communication with others and in written communication in the workplace. Of note are the average ratings discussed in section 5.3.1, namely, the average rating of 80% and above for the novice employees' degree of enthusiasm, adaptability to the work environment, general appearance and neatness, and attendance and punctuality. These are marginally higher when compared

to those of 76% for verbal communication, 75% for written communication skills, and 73% for decision making skills (refer to Table 5.1). These ratings show that novice employees require a longer duration of time in the workplace in order to become proficient in verbal and written communication and in decision making. These skills require practice and the ability of novice employees to draw on knowledge of the discourse community, subject matter, writing process and rhetorical knowledge (Walters, Hunter & Giddens, 2007) of the specific workplace environment in which they find themselves.

### 5.3.3 Genres of writing: adapting to workplace-specific requirements

The Personal Skills Assessment forms did not require employers to rate novice employees across all the workplace genres. Only a few genres are mentioned on the form. The novice employees' performances within these genres are indicated in Table 5.3.

**Table 5.3: Novice employees' performance in workplace genres**

Organising of a Special Event (e.g. meeting, workshop, conference, etc.)	75%
Application of theoretical knowledge	79%
Can the learner collect, analyse and organise information	80%
Has the learner the ability to solve problems	77%
Can the learner use technology effectively and responsibly	84%

The average rating for novice employees' use of technology is 84% and indicates that novice employees can use technology effectively and responsibly in the workplace. Other average ratings are: 80% for the novice employees' abilities to collect, analyse and organise information, 79% for their application of theoretical knowledge, 77% for their abilities to solve problems, and 75% for the organising of special events. These ratings are high and show the novice employees' abilities to draw on cognitive higher order skills such as problem-solving, analysing, organising and applying what they had learned. These findings show that students are required to make use of these cognitive skills in the workplace and that these skills play a significant role in novice employees becoming proficient writers in the workplace (refer to section 2.3.3). Research into graduates transitions to the workplace shows that graduates require more than the knowledge of workplace genres (Freedman, 1994; Dias et al., 1999; Dannels, 2000). Graduates also require problem-solving abilities (Kellogg, 2006), critical analysis (Miller, Larsen & Gaitens, 1996), and abilities to research, summarise and analyse information in order to cope with the realities of the workplace (Schneider & Andre, 2005).

### 5.3.4 The audience and purpose: being a good colleague

The Personal Skills Assessment forms did not require employers to rate novice employees specifically with regard to the customers and clients of the company, but did require rating with regard to management and peers within the workplace. Employers' ratings are shown in Table 5.4.

**Table 5.4: Novice employees' human relations**

Human relations : Top management and peers	79%
Listening Skills : Listen to the opinions and ideas of others	80%
Assertiveness : Means relaying opinions across in a mature and determined manner	77%

The average ratings of 80% for listening skills and 79% for human relations are high and show that the novice employees' abilities to listen to the opinions of others and their human relations skills with top management and peers are good. One employer commented that the novice employee 'communicated well with staff and she has easily fitted into the management team' (PE10). Novice employees' assertiveness abilities were rated at 77% and this shows that novice employees were able to communicate and share their opinions with the management and their colleagues, in a mature and determined manner.

#### **5.4 Data from novice employees' writing**

In this section the documentation data from the workplace writing is presented. The data includes examples of novice employees' writings in the workplace. Six visits were undertaken to the workplace where novice employees were engaged in experiential training. Permission was obtained from the employers for novice employees to provide examples of the documents that they were required to produce in the workplace. A variety of documentation was produced and observed at the workplace, but only those that were not confidential were used for the purposes of this research.

##### 5.4.1 Contexts of writing: joining a discourse community

The context of the workplace differs to that of the HE context and novice employees were required to gain knowledge of the discourse community and its requirements. This entails knowledge of the company, the departments within the company and knowledge of the various expectations of the writers and the customers, clients and readers, who take part in discussions about a topic (Walters, Hunter & Giddens, 2007). Novice employees needed to understand, for example, when it was acceptable to address a client by a first name, such as 'Dear Peter' and to insert greetings and personal good wishes (refer to Figure 5.4), and when personalising the information would be inappropriate (Refer to Figure 5.3).

There is also a need to distinguish between more informal and more formal forms of writing. Often the more formal forms have a legal status, that is, they are binding on the sender or receiver in some way. The novice employees of a company that undertakes the packaging and shipping of products were asked to design a delivery note to be signed by the customer on receipt of the order. Figure 5.2 is an example of a delivery note which requires that the sender delivers the correct order, and it is binding on the customer once he or she signs that the equipment is installed or delivered.

**DELIVERY NOTE**

NAME OF CLIENT:

NAME OF BUSINESS:

EQUIPMENT INSTALLED/ DELIVERED:

<b><u>PRODUCT CODE</u></b>	<b><u>DESCRIPTION</u></b>	<b><u>QTY</u></b>
[number]	Butler [number]	10
[number]	Alpha [number]	14
[number]	Transmitter Kit	1
[number]	Power Supply [number]	1
[number]	Standard Cable [number]	1

I hereby confirm that the above mentioned equipment has been installed/delivered at your business.

.....  
CLIENT

.....  
SIGNATURE

.....  
DATE

.....  
SALES REPRESENTATIVE

.....  
SIGNATURE

**Figure 5.2: Delivery note**

**5.4.2 Novice employees as writers: becoming professional employees**

The novice employees were engaged with various duties, such as: answering calls, sending facsimiles, responding to staff queries, dealing with customers, assisting the senior personnel or colleagues, sending e-mails, editing the company’s website, data capturing, and working on spreadsheets and reconciliations. Their writings studied indicate that students were polite and professional in their interactions with the customers and staff. Figure 5.3 is an example of a facsimile sent by a novice employee to a customer reflecting a professional style and tone.

Novice employees reported that written work was ‘always checked’ (N5) and that writing produced must be ‘perfect’ (N2). The requirements of writing in the workplace are that novice employees adopt the habits of professional writers, which include consideration of the needs of the audience and the drafting and revising of texts produced (Walters, Hunter & Giddens, 2007).

<b>COMPANY LETTERHEAD</b>	
To: Ms [Customer name]	From: [Company name]
Fax: [Fax number]	Pages: 1 (incl. cover)
Company: [Company name]	Date: 12 May 2008
<p>Dear Ms [Customer name]</p> <p>The bank details you required are as follows;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standard Bank – [Branch name]</li> <li>• Branch Code – [Branch code]</li> <li>• Account Number – [Account number]</li> </ul> <p>Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me on the numbers below.</p> <p>Kind regards,</p> <p>[Name of novice employee] ADMINISTRATION</p> <p>Tel: [number] Fax: [number] E-mail: [address]</p>	

**Figure 5.3: Facsimile**

#### 5.4.3 Genres of writing: familiar and new genres

Most of the documentation studied was produced according to the generic formats of the business writing sub-genres as taught in the Communication 1 and 11 courses at the HE sites. The exceptions were: hospital reports, policy documents, marketing and advertising documents, product manuals, product specifications, and in-house on-line generated documentation. Although report writing is taught in HE, there are many varieties of reports which are utilised in a variety of settings. At one of the medium-sized companies, medical reports are produced and novice employees were required to capture data on a computer generated report format.

The types of electronic written communication which novice employees produced were: forms, databases, training reports, e-mails, training needs assessment forms, data capturing onto databases, facsimiles, notes for training, travel documentation, internet data bases research, letters in a set format, presentations for publishers, proposals for outside companies, specifications, quotations, invoices, minutes, reports, spread sheets, bank reconciliations, Excel spreadsheets, sales reports, data capture of CVs, letters, brochures, marketing and advertising materials, and operational reports. At a small

company the novice employee was required to write a letter to accompany the customer's order. Figure 5.4 is an example of the letter.

**Attention: Mr [Client Name]**  
**[Client Address]**

---

Dear Peter

I hope this letter finds you well; we would just like to take the time to thank you for using our product and services, namely, our [product name].

We, at [company name] hope that this meets with your satisfaction and would like to assure you that [company name] is devoted to a customer contentment guarantee, whereby our aim is to provide solutions that work, increase revenue and the efficient operation of your business.

We look forward to working with you in the future and to continue building a solid relationship with you, based on good business principles and a common desire to cooperatively offer the best in customer service levels.

On behalf of me (sic) and the [company name] team, we trust that you will find great enjoyment and value in using our product. Please feel free to contact us should you require any further assistance or regarding any technical issues.

Kind regards,

.....  
**MANAGER**

**Figure 5.4: Letter accompanying customer's order**

At one workplace the novice employees were required to produce an operational report, which was in response to a weekly feedback meeting on their performance. Figure 5.5 is an example of an operational report.

**From: May** **Week: 3** **Date: 26 May 2008**

REFERENCE NO.	TASK	STATUS	DUE DATE	PROBLEMS & SOLUTIONS
KB-T&D/fb070401	HR Workshop proposal Course	Complete Complete		Awaiting approval/ <b>Prepare program with outcomes for [date]</b> Postponed
KB-T&D/fb070402	Proposal	Incomplete		Searched for accreditation proposals but unsuccessful-Need details to complete.
KB-C/fb070401	Contracts-Driver Receptionist	In process		Error with Client's logo <b>-Provide copies of job</b> Near completion, editing of actual contracts <b>Complete to be checked by [Employer name]</b> Complete waiting for Client to collect.
KB-dmin/fb1404	Marketing Manual Covers	In progress		Near completion. <b>Complete handed to [Employer name] FINAL DATE [date]</b>
KB-dmin/fb260501	Research – Section 85			<b>Completed to be checked</b>
KB-T&D/fb260501	Credit Guarantee			<b>E-mailed and left message</b>
KB-dmin/fb260505	Templates:			<b>To be discussed...need clarity!!!</b>

**Figure 5.5: Operational report**

#### 5.4.4 The audience and purpose: sharing new and unfamiliar information

The audience and purpose of the novice employees' documents were identified and are listed in Table 5.5. The table shows that a variety of business writing was produced by novice employees. These were produced for the customers and clients and for supervisors, employers and colleagues. The writings produced for the clients were mainly for the purposes of providing and sharing information with the clients, or for selling the products and services of the companies. The purposes for some of the writings produced were to create records or 'organisational memory' (Geisler et al., 2001: 279) of the interactions and transactions between the clients and the company, and these included delivery notes, quotations and invoices. Research on workplace writing views texts as a technology that performs an important function and influences a wide range of social actions in the workplace (Geisler et al., 2001).

The novice employees were required to produce writings for the supervisors, employers and their colleagues at the organisations at which they were employed. Several of these writings had the purpose of sharing and providing information. For example, novice employees sent e-mails and facsimiles and produced records of proceedings at meetings. They also produced lists of data, such as stores and customer lists, financial transactions and so on. Some of the writings produced were for the recording of activities that may provide a basis for disciplinary action because they make public the tasks people are supposed to perform; while others, as Geisler et al. (2001) point out, may hold legal implications for the company, such as the minutes of the private meetings of companies, where decisions taken are often legally binding.

### **5.5 Data from interviews with the novice employees**

This section discusses the findings of the interviews conducted with six novice employees at workplace sites. The novice employees held the positions of Assistant Administration Clerk, Personal Assistant, Administrative Assistant, Debtors Clerk, Receptionist, and Intern Administrator. Three novice employees were ESL learners and three spoke English as their home language. All the novice employees spoke English in the workplace and identified English as the language of business. Three of the novice employees identified Afrikaans as the other language used mainly for oral communication purposes in response to customer queries or telephone calls.

#### 5.5.1 Contexts of writing: writing to deadlines

The workplace community consists of the employers, staff and customers and clients of the companies. The employers and staff aim to satisfy the customers and clients and to provide professional service on behalf of the companies by whom they are employed. Research shows that 'writing in the workplace is always situated in a context' (Kleimann, 1993: 67) and that the organisation and the units within the organisation can influence nearly every aspect of writing. Novice employees enter the workplace

communities and have to become enculturated into the writing norms and practices of those communities (Paré, 2000; Winsor, 2001). Writing is an activity inseparable from the contexts in which it takes place and where it is carried out by employees who form discourse communities (Swales, 1990; Bazerman 1999).

**Table 5.5: Audience and purpose of novice employees' writing**

Item	Audience	Purpose
Bank reconciliations	Company	Financial records
Brochures	Clients	Selling/providing information
CVs	Company	Record
Databases	Company	Record
Delivery Note	Clients/Company	Record (legal)
E-mails	Clients/Company	Providing and sharing information
Facsimiles	Clients/Company	Providing and sharing information
Invoices	Clients/Company	Selling/financial record
Letters	Clients	Selling/providing information
Marketing & advertising material	Clients	Selling/providing information
Memoranda	Company	Providing and sharing information
Minutes	Company	Record
Notes for training	Clients	Providing and sharing information
Policy documents	Company	Record
Presentations	Clients	Selling/providing information
Product manuals	Clients	Selling/providing information
Proposals	Clients/Company	Selling/providing information
Quotations	Clients/Company	Selling/providing information
Reports	Clients/Company	Providing information
Specifications	Clients	Selling/providing information
Spreadsheets	Company	Record
Stores and customer lists	Company	Record
Telephone messages	Clients/Company	Conveying information
Training needs assessment forms	Company	Providing and sharing information
Travel documentation	Company	Record
User guides	Clients	Selling/providing information
Website pages	Clients	Selling/providing information

The workplace is a highly computerised environment and the novice employees were required to make use of a variety of electronic communication genres, such as, PowerPoint, for the production of presentations. One novice employee reported that 'everything is done by computer' (N2) and another that she produced electronic written documentation 'all the time' (N4). Novice employees reported that deadlines were important and that they had adhered to the required deadlines for the production of the written documentation. Accuracy was also mentioned. All the novice employees confirmed that their employers checked the writing which they produced. For example, 'I always proofread and

senior members of staff always check documents produced for them' (N1). Three of the novice employees had to make corrections to the written documentation they produced before the document was sent further. Three of the novice employees responded that they did not 'often' have to make corrections.

#### 5.5.2 Novice employees as writers: reviewing and collaboration

The novice employees felt that they were proficient at most of the written tasks, but that, in cases where difficulty was experienced, they were able to ask for assistance. Three novice employees had to obtain clarification from the employer when producing written documentation, for example, 'they always show me what they want and thereafter I can carry on alone' (N1); 'when I am not sure and I do not want to waste time, I ask' (N3); and 'with some things and especially the websites' (N6). Four of the novice employees said that they proofread the writing which they produced.

Three of the novice employees found that there were no written documents which they had found difficult or had been unable to produce. With regard to difficulties experienced, one of the novice employees reported that 'at first minutes' were difficult, but now she had 'no problems' (N3). Others indicated that 'printing of labels'(N3) and producing documents on systems application programming '(SAP)' (N4) had presented difficulties, but having mastered these, 'there were no other problems'(N4). The novice employees produced written documentation individually and in collaboration with other employees. For example, one employee claimed to be writing 'mainly independently now' (N4) and another reported that 'there is teamwork and I can ask for help' (N5).

The reviewing and correcting of written documentation is recognised as an essential function of business writing in the workplace (refer to sections 2.3.2 and 2.3.3). Hayes and Flower (1980) identify three processes of text production, namely, planning ideas, translating ideas into text and reviewing the ideas and text. According to Kellogg (2008) the process of reviewing ideas and text is not only left to the revision of the document composition, but it is also relevant and necessary in the composition of the first draft along with the planning and the language generation.

#### 5.5.3 Genres of writing: texts mediated by information technologies

The novice employees produced a variety of genres of writing in the workplace and were involved with a number of duties while trying to produce the written documentation. The duties included: answering calls, responding to staff queries, dealing with customers, packaging orders for the couriers, assisting the senior personnel or colleagues, sending e-mails and facsimiles to database clients, receiving clients, assisting the reception during lunch times, taking messages, and helping clients who needed information. None of the novice employees interviewed reported on using voice mail, digital voice recording or SMSs in order to produce business documentation.

Most of the texts produced in the workplace were mediated by information technologies. The novice employees were required to write e-mails and letters. Most of the novice employees were required to send facsimiles, to take the minutes of meetings and to write reports. A novice employee commented that minutes 'must be accurate' (N1) and another that 'I do sales reports on our in-house programme' (N4).

Most of the novice employees were required to do internet research and to capture data onto the databases of the respective companies. Novice employees were also involved with financial computer programmes for the drawing up of bank reconciliations, invoices and quotations, and one novice employee worked extensively on web page designing. These findings support the emphasis placed on computer skills and CMC in the OMT programme (refer to section 4.2.3). CMC has taken over the field of correspondence (Sullivan 2000) and novice employees are required to become proficient in the use of the electronic communication genres if they are to succeed in the workplace.

#### 5.5.4 The audience and purpose: satisfying multiple audiences with specific needs

The novice employees produced a variety of business writing in the workplace in accordance with the specific requirements of the workplace and in order to communicate with multiple audiences with specific needs (Schneider & Andre, 2005).

The audiences for whom novice employees produce business writing are the customers, clients and staff of the company for whom they are employed. All of the novice employees were required to forward written documentation produced to customers or clients. For example, one novice employee sent 'faxes daily' (N3) while another regularly sent 'information, brochures and accreditations to customers' (N6).

### **5.6 Data from observations in the workplace**

In this section, data from observations in the workplace is presented. The workplace observations were undertaken at six work sites where novice employees were involved with their daily duties. The feedback from the observations is discussed in this sub-section according to the theoretical model, as explained in section 5.1. Two large, two medium-sized and two small companies were visited and the business writing practices of the novice employees were observed for approximately 30 to 45 minutes in each instance.

#### 5.6.1 Contexts of writing: writing in a busy space

While observations were being undertaken, five of the employers or supervisors seldom interacted with the novice employees. One of the employers frequently interacted with the novice employee and collaborated with her on the production and checking of inventory lists. During the instances when

novice employees interacted with the employers it was to answer a call, to inform them of customers who had arrived for meetings or to hand over some work for completion. Novice employees were observed interacting with customers, their supervisors and colleagues.

Five of the novice employees were frequently involved in producing electronic written documentation and one student worked most often on upgrading the websites of the company. All of the novice employees undertaking their experiential training were not involved with using voice mail, digital voice recordings or SMSs when producing business documentation. The novice employees were not observed adhering to deadlines and only two novice employees were observed for a short period evaluating their written documentation.

Four of the novice employees were frequently involved in other duties such as answering telephones, assisting other staff members or clients, taking inventory of stock, sending e-mails and facsimiles, and working on spreadsheets. One novice employee was occupied most of the time with answering the telephone and assisting clients and one student worked most of the time on upgrading the website of the company. Figure 5.6 indicates the levels of activity associated with business writing in workplaces.

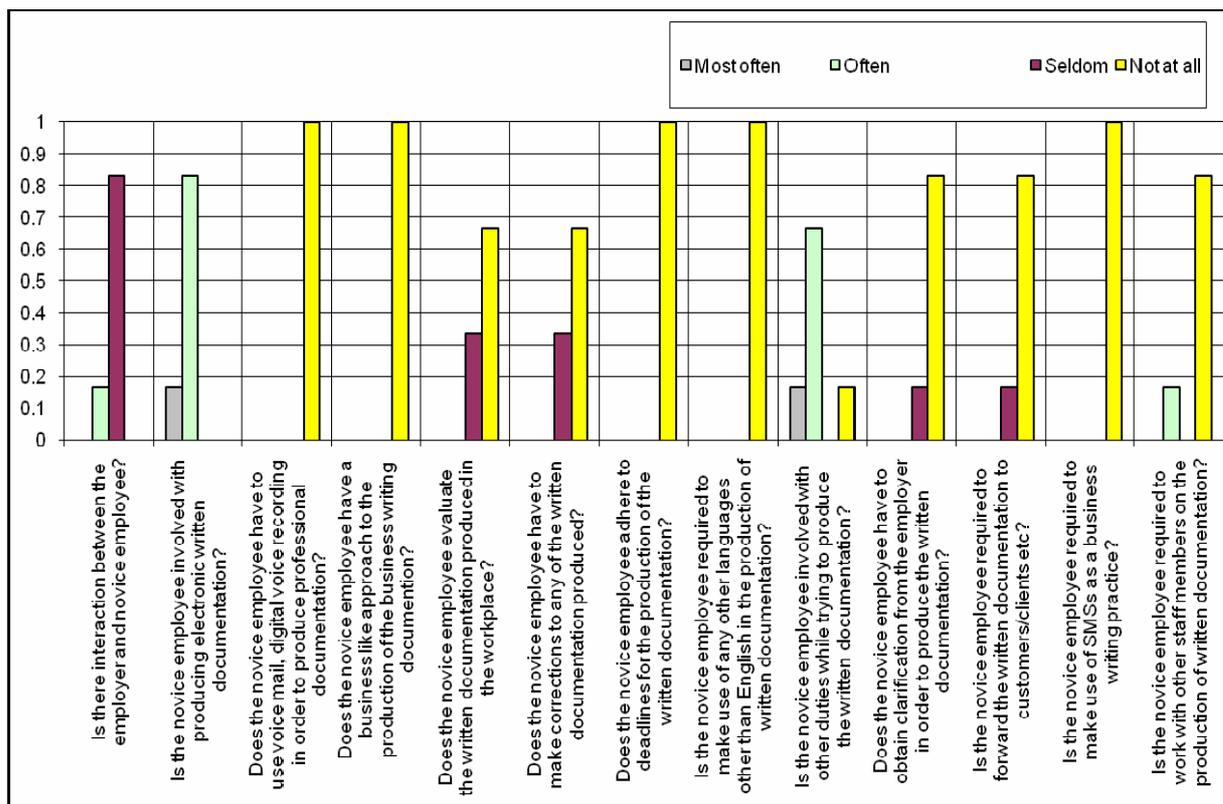


Figure 5.6: Activities in the workplace

#### 5.6.2 Novice employees as writers: polite and competent communicators

The impression from observations was that students conducted themselves professionally. They were focused on the task at hand. They were polite to customers and generally attentive. They appeared to be very competent. Only two of the novice employees were observed making corrections to the written documentation being produced. One student was observed correcting a typing error and another student made a correction to the website documentation of the organisation. One student was observed clarifying details with the employer regarding the inventory list she was producing and one student was observed forwarding facsimiles to customers. During the observations novice employees only spoke English and were not required to use any other languages in the production of written documentation.

#### 5.6.3 Genres of writing: individual and collaborative composition

The novice employees were observed producing a variety of business and electronic writing genres, such as e-mails, facsimiles, inventory lists, website pages, spreadsheets and so on. The novice employees worked individually and in collaboration with others on the drafting and revising of business writing. These are essential workplace practices and some organisations leave writers to work informally to collaborate with others on the composition of documents, or sometimes to convene meetings for drafting and revising so that the views of editors, audiences and others are recognised (Sharples & Van der Geest, 1996; Walters, Hunter & Giddens, 2007).

#### 5.6.4 The audience and purpose: internal and external audiences

The audiences of the writings of novice employees are the customers and clients of the company by whom they are employed. The purpose for writing would be to communicate with customers and clients in order to ensure their satisfaction with the products or services or to get them to purchase a particular product or service. It may also be for the purpose of acquiring and maintaining contracts thereby generating income for their company.

As the workplace has different goals and is directed towards producing that which is the business of the organisation, whether a product or service (Boud & Solomon, 2001), it follows that the purpose for the production of the business writings by novice employees would be directed towards achieving the goals of the company. For example, in one company, the novice employees were observed producing writing for audiences within the company where they were employed, such as the drawing up of inventory lists for the supervisor; while in other companies the novice employees were observed writing client letters and e-mails. According to the academic staff involved in student placement, novice employees must be prepared to work for small, medium or large companies in a variety of fields, such as advertising, legal, medical, tourism, insurance, as well as in the general business areas.

They are required to communicate with multiple audiences in order to achieve the goals of the companies by whom they are employed.

### **5.7 Data from interviews with employers**

This section discusses the findings of the interviews conducted with six employers. The findings from the interviews will be discussed according to the contexts of writing, the novice employees as writers, the genres of writing and the audience and purpose of writing. Semi-structured interviews of approximately 45 minutes were conducted with six employers, two from large companies, two from medium-sized companies and two from small companies. The Head: Library and Information Services of a large private company of approximately 320 employees, and the Settlement Manager of a large retail company of more than 500 employees were interviewed. The Senior Administration Officer Human Resources Development at a medium-sized government organisation of approximately 150 employees and the Director of a medium-sized recruitment company with three branches comprising approximately 30 employees were interviewed. The Sales Director of a small private company with 7 employees and the Director of a small training company comprising 3 employees were interviewed.

#### 5.7.1 Contexts of writing: complex realities

Novice employees often struggle to adjust to the demands of the workplace. This was evident in much of the interview data. For example, one supervisor stated that ‘the corporate environment and its requirements were a complete adjustment for the student in the beginning’ (IE2) and another employer claimed that ‘it is difficult for novice employees to conceptualise the business world and office politics’ (IE4). Most of the employers provided mentorship and support to the novice employees when they commenced and during the experiential training period. One employer claimed to ‘give a lot of support to novice employees and I have weekly operational meetings where novice employees and I give feedback’ (IE6<sup>2</sup>).

All the employers identified English as the language of business and business writing. Afrikaans was identified by four of the employers as the other language used mainly for oral, and rarely for written, communication purposes in response to customer queries or telephone calls. Some employers identified Xhosa, Zulu and French as languages which were also used when dealing with customers. One employer who had international clients made use of other languages to produce written documentation.

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<sup>2</sup> Employer No. 6 declined to be tape-recorded; field notes of the interview were made.

### 5.7.2 Novice employees as writers: writers in need of supervision

Four of the employers were satisfied that the novice employees had a business-like approach to the production of written documentation. One employer reported that ‘novice employees have a timeframe and they try to adhere to it...they try to stick to what we taught them and if they have a problem they ask’ (IE1). Two of the employers reported that ‘the student is professional and met all the deadlines... she needs to be less immature’ (IE4) and ‘novice employees are not there yet...they are good with instruction manuals, presentations and so on, but on anything more, they need supervision’ (IE2).

All the employers gave novice employees opportunities to evaluate their writing and to rectify any errors made in the business writing, for example, ‘she edits publishing, advertising information and proposals’ (IE6). Evaluating and reviewing of written documentation is an essential function which needs to be undertaken by professional writers. According to Kellogg (2006) the cognitive demands of writing includes reviewing what has been written and involves reading and editing in order to detect faults of diction, spelling, punctuation, and the coherence of the whole text.

The task of reviewing written texts is an important role which characterises the progression to professional expertise in writing (Kellogg, 2008). Novice employees need to meet the cognitive demands of writing with regard to planning, translating and reviewing that are necessary skills which they need to practise and develop in order for them to be effective in the workplace (Kellogg, 2006). This requires a life-long learning approach to the development of business writing skills and writing development is likely to continue when novice employees enter the workplace (MacKinnon, 1993).

The general opinions of the employers were of those expressing satisfaction, for example, ‘all documents are fine, and the student is even re-vamping our websites’(IE6) and ‘the student did a nice job if given work to do, producing proposals, data capture of CVs, e-mails, facsimiles, letters and so on’(IE5). Only one employer indicated that the novice employees could not write corporate letters: ‘they cannot do corporate letters to directors’ (IE2). Five of the employers had no problems in this regard, but one employer of three novice employees who were ESL learners, identified the need for exposure to, and practice of, business writing: ‘I can’t say that there are any documents that they battle with. With regard to minutes, if there are errors as a result of misinterpretation, they do corrections. They just need practice and exposure’ (IE3).

Only two of the employers felt that the novice employees were unable to meet all of the electronic written communication requirements of their companies and their comments were: ‘the basics were there, but the student required a bit more training on Excel’ (IE4) and ‘they are totally fine, but they should be taught how to handle basic computer problems, how to set up a computer, connect a printer and so on’ (IE2). These findings have implications for the information administration courses of the

OMT programme (refer to section 4.2.3). While the field of information technology is constantly changing, novice employees should not only be prepared for the current workplace, but also the future workplace (Miller, Larsen & Gaitens, 1996; Barnett, 2004).

### 5.7.3 Genres of writing: the knowledge bases of workplace genres

In this sub-section the employers' views of the novice employees' use of workplace writing genres is presented and discussed.

#### *Business writing genres*

Employers confirmed that the main types of written documents used in their organisations were: policy documents, memoranda, business, sales and operational reports, letters, e-mails, proposals, user guides, presentations, product manuals, product specifications, minutes of meetings, spreadsheets, tables, bank reconciliations, curriculum vitae, brochures, facsimiles, marketing and advertising materials, form production, documentation generated by companies software programmes, SAP generated documents, and web page designing. The types of documents which novice employees produced to the employers' satisfaction were: reports, policy documents, lists, databases, guides, facsimiles, spreadsheets, stores and customer lists, reconciliations, proposals, data capture of CVs, letters, specifications, user guides, e-mails, and presentations.

Interviews with both the employers and novice employees of a particular organisation revealed that compiling the minutes of meetings was not an easy task for the three novice employees undertaking their experiential training. However, the Head of Department required that novice employees regularly take the minutes of the meetings and reported that 'I now can see improvements on the minutes and novice employees do the corrections when necessary'(IE3). Another employer held weekly meetings at which an operational report was used so that the employer and novice employee had the opportunity to provide feedback on the performances, difficulties and expectations of the novice employee (refer to Figure 5.5 Operational report).

The production of the minutes of a meeting requires knowledge of the company and subject matter under discussion. Beaufort's (1999) model of knowledge domains was expanded upon (Walters, Hunter & Giddens, 2007) and shows that the transition from HE to the workplace requires that writers need to acquire six knowledge-based practices when producing a text (refer to Figure 2.2). When the novice employees enter the workplace they need to apply these knowledge-based practices, but they lack the following: discourse community knowledge, knowledge of the information and understanding about the company, departments and staff, subject matter knowledge regarding the topic or topics of the meetings, and rhetorical knowledge of the information and/or understanding about the purpose(s) of the writing, the claims and evidence that may be included in the writing and the audience who will

read the writing. Once novice employees are able to put these knowledge-based practices into operation, their writing improves. Research shows that the writing practices of novice employees have benefited from the opportunity for deliberate practice especially when it is done in the context of a 'professionally relevant task domain' (Kellogg, 2008: 18) and that one way to train new graduate employees is by the mentoring of their writing processes (Speck, 1990).

#### *Electronic communication genres*

The electronic communication genres utilised at the companies visited were: Microsoft software, in-house software, online databases, PowerPoint, SAP, in-house home shopping, MWEB, internet/electronic banking, Outlook, intelligence database for the generation of documents, and internet research.

None of the employers interviewed mentioned voice mail, digital voice recording or the use of SMSs in the business context. One employer expressed the need to consider digital voice recording for his field of work especially the device which can convert digital voice recordings directly into text. In most cases the novice employees were able to meet the demands of the communication electronic genres used at the particular work sites at which they were employed.

Electronic communication genres play an important role in the production of business written documentation. Each of the employers acknowledged the importance of novice employees being computer literate. The necessity for novice employees to be prepared to take on the challenges of the present and future workplace requires competence in writing in a world of technology (Sharples & Van der Geest, 1996; Winsor, 2001).

#### 5.7.4 The audience and purpose: identifying the audience range

The employers' interviews revealed a wide audience range. The audiences ranged from a general group of customers and clients, to specifically targeted groups of customers or clients, such as the nurses and medical staff of a medium-sized company. The novice employee of the health industry related company also produced business writing for the doctors, researchers and the Senior Administration Officer.

Research shows that interns entering the workplace recognise the complex 'juggling act' required to address multiple audiences (Schneider & Andre, 2005: 203). According to Kellogg (2006) the cognitive demands of writing are complex processes as there could be a number of problems of structure and the writer needs to take into account the needs of the audience and look for the right tone and degree of complexity. The progression to professional expertise in business writing requires that the writer takes into account the needs of the reader (Miller, Larsen & Gaitens, 1996; Kellogg, 2008).

## **5.8 Conclusion**

This section summarises the findings of the workplace data across the categories of 1) context, 2) writing abilities of the novice employees, 3) genres identified and 4) audience and purpose of writing.

### 5.8.1 Contexts of writing

According to Miller, Larsen and Gaitens (1996: 23) workplace communication is ‘complex and multidimensional’. The findings from those involved with communication in the workplace similarly describe the complexity of the workplace context that focuses on the exchange of information. Much of this information is subject to legal requirements, and needs to be concise and accurate. The workplace context consists of a discourse community comprising employers, staff, customers and clients. The level of formality of these relationships needs to be understood: whether it is appropriate to communicate in an informal, personal tone – or whether a more formal and impersonal style is required. Novice employees have to become enculturated into the writing norms and practices of the workplace and required support and mentorship.

The workplace is a busy environment – the writer needs to focus on the task at hand and not be distracted by the level of activity around him or her. In addition, there are usually tight deadlines to meet and employees need to work quickly as well as accurately.

Novice employees are required to adjust to the employers’ demands for specific writing that is concise, accurate and specifically tailored to the needs of the readers. For example, one of the interviewees said: ‘I am strict about quality’ (IE1); while another required ‘all staff [to] check and double check everything’ (IE4). The employers recognised that some of the novice employees had not adjusted to the demands of the workplace. These novice employees lacked confidence and maturity and had difficulty conceptualising the politics of the office environment, as one employer put it: ‘she is not at the level she is required to be at’ (IE4).

### 5.8.2 Novice employees as writers

Writers in the workplace are required to perform their duties as professionals and to abide by the requirements of the workplace. They have to meet deadlines required by their supervisors and need to be polite and professional in their communications with the customers and staff. In the workplace ESL speakers are required to be competent communicators with good writing skills. The writing demands of the workplace calls for writers to plan, produce and review their work individually and in collaboration with other staff or senior staff members.

Most of the novice employees demonstrated a business-like approach to the production of their writing and, according to one of the employers, were ‘dedicated and focused and wanted to learn’(IE3), but

some were still in need of supervision. Mentorship and support were provided to novice employees during the experiential training period and many employers ‘worked closely with them’ (IE1). While business writing is often produced in collaboration with other colleagues in the workplace (Miller, Larsen & Gaitens, 1996; Walters, Hunter & Giddens, 2007), the role of manager and employer as mentor of the writing process is an efficient way to train novice employees (Speck, 1990.) Writing development is therefore not complete at the end of a HE qualification (Kellogg, 2008) and novice employees entering the workplace after two years of study at a HE institution still require guidance and mentoring in order to develop the necessary skills to become competent in writing business genres in the workplace.

### 5.8.3 Genres of writing

There are numerous sub-genres of business writing in the workplace. Most of these sub-genres, such as: letters, minutes of meetings, e-mails and memoranda, were familiar to the novice employees, but some were unfamiliar, such as: hospital reports, in-house online generated documentation, policy documents, proposals, user guides, product manuals, product specifications, and marketing and advertising materials.

Writers need to adapt their writing to workplace-specific requirements such as accuracy and style. They need to develop the skills to draw upon knowledge of the discourse community, the subject matter, genres, writing process, self-awareness of their abilities and rhetorical knowledge (Walters, Hunter & Giddens, 2007).

Novice employees experienced difficulties with the writing of minutes, instruction- and message-taking, producing labels, producing SAP generated documentation and corporate letters. One employer explained that novice employees could not be given ‘anything too technical without supervision’ (IE2); while another employer claimed that ‘with regular practice and exposure’ (IE3) the writing of minutes improved and novice employees ‘now know the job and do not need help’ (IE4). Research shows that exposure to, and knowledge of, the discourse community in which writing takes place and deliberate practice (Kellogg, 2008) are necessary for the development of writing expertise in the workplace.

Writing in the workplace is mediated by information technologies. Most of the novice employees met the electronic communication genre requirements of their companies and employers considered their skills to be ‘totally fine’ (IE2) and felt that they were ‘clued up’ (IE6 ) on information technology in the workplace.

#### 5.8.4 The audience and purpose of writing

The writer in the workplace needs to be aware of the multiple audiences who have real needs and specific information requirements. Information is often shared with the customers and clients, the external audiences of workplace writing, who may require new and unfamiliar information. The information provided must be accurate and must meet the specific needs of the customer. This requires the writer to be a responsible and effective communicator for much is at stake if the customers' needs are not satisfied. Writers also write for internal audiences and are required to provide and share information and to collaborate on the production and review of writing with senior staff and colleagues.

As professional writers in the workplace, novice employees need to view their writing as 'functional information exchanges' and need to design their writing to effectively meet the needs of multiple audiences (Paretti, 2006: 191).

In the next chapter, the comparative study of the findings in HE and the workplace and the recommendations and suggestions for areas of further study are discussed.

## **CHAPTER 6: COMPARATIVE SUMMARY OF WRITTEN COMMUNICATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE WORKPLACE**

Although it is clear that the transfer of writing skills from the classroom to the workplace is a complex phenomenon and that there are no easy answers to the question of how best to prepare students for workplace writing, our research leads us to the position that despite the differences between classroom and workplace writing, universities play an important role in preparing students for workplace writing (Scheiner & Andre, 2005: 196).

### **6.1 Introduction**

There are three levels of organisation in this chapter. The first section compares the findings from the HE and workplace sites under the headings of the theoretical model of written communication developed from the literature (refer to section 2.5), namely: 1) the contexts of writing, 2) students as writers, 3) genres of writing and 4) the audience and purpose of the writing. These categories together with themes drawn from the research findings comprise the sub-headings under which the data are discussed.

The second section addresses the first three research questions, namely: 1) what are the business writing practices of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year Communication students? 2) what are the business writing practices of office managers? and 3) what are the 'gaps' in the business writing practices between HE OMT programmes and related workplaces? The third section addresses the recommendations and the final research question, namely: 4) how can these gaps be addressed to ensure the adequate preparation of OMT students for the workplaces of the future?

### **6.2 Contexts of writing: HE and the workplace**

In this section the findings with regard to the HE and workplace contexts are compared. Each context has specific and different goals, requirements and discourse communities.

#### **6.2.1 The HE context: knowledge production**

The HE context, in contrast to that of the workplace, is one of learning in which the acquisition of knowledge is accommodated and facilitated (Boud & Solomon, 2000). It is a context of knowledge production and information exchange between academics as instructors and the students as learners. It comprises a discourse community of academics and learners. The academics are often involved in their own research activities, but predominantly they are focused on teaching and student development. The academics offering the Communication 1 and 11 courses are educators preparing students to take on the roles of novice employees and eventually professionals in the workplace. The students are learners whose long-term goals are to prepare themselves for the workplace, but whose

immediate and short-term goals are to meet the course requirements so that they can graduate and obtain their diplomas and degrees.

The HE context attempts to prepare students for the workplace environment by imposing workplace values of adherence to punctuality, responsibility, meeting deadlines, ensuring the accuracy of written work and incorporating feedback. The academic staff attempt to maintain contact with the needs of the workplace by remaining current on the latest business writing practices. In this regard, one of the academics interviewed stated: 'I attend administration staff workshops....' (A2). As the HE context is not the context in which business writing is common, academics attempt to simulate the writing requirements of the workplace by using examples from textbooks, notes and hand-outs from newspapers and current business related articles. In the academic setting, the research findings show that writing is often 'pedagogized' for learning purposes. This means, as Russell (1997) has shown, that students' professional writing in the HE context develops along with genres of disciplinary practice and traditions of research articles, essays, case-studies and tests. Thus the research findings show that difficulties exist for staff with regard to teaching workplace genres within the academic context. Research similarly suggests that 'simulations of workplace writing fail to prepare students for business writing because they cannot adequately replicate the local rhetorical complexity of workplace contexts' (Dias et al., 1999: 201).

Learning-based practices in higher educational contexts are in strong contrast to professional levels of practice in the workplace. The HE context focuses on preparing students for acquisition of learning rather than participation in learning. Learning is often provided in a bound set of notes or in a textbook and tends to be decontextualised. Courses are often constructed as separate and apart from the body of knowledge and practices on which they focus and are not related to the ongoing challenges of the practice (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). Unlike the busy, demanding workplace context, in the HE context, students are able to withdraw from the busy classroom environment to produce writing in quiet and studious environments, such as the library or study rooms.

### 6.2.2 The workplace context: sharing information

Research shows that 'writing in the workplace is always situated in a specific context' (Kleimann, 1993: 67) and that the organisation and the units within the organisation can influence nearly every aspect of writing. The workplace has different goals to that of HE and these goals are directed towards producing that which is the business of the organisation, whether a product or service (Boud & Solomon, 2000). Unlike the HE context, information sharing is the central focus of the modern workplace and writing performs a function of sharing information with the multiple audiences in the workplace.

The workplace community also differs from that of the HE community as it consists of the employers, staff, customers and clients of the companies. The employers and staff aim to satisfy the customers and clients and to provide professional service on behalf of the companies by whom they are employed. In the workplace there are complex realities of writing situations. In this context writing work takes place and has to be completed according to strict deadlines.

The workplace is a busy context and the writer needs to be able to produce writing and to not be distracted by the activity of the workplace. The workplace context and its writing requirements are different to those of HE. Writing performs different functions in each context and in the workplace context there are very specific writing requirements. The workplace demands awareness of multiple audiences with specific needs, specific knowledge requirements, concise and accurate writing skills, higher level analytical skills and ‘political considerations in workplace writing’ (Schneider & Andre, 2005: 203). For example, an employer reported that ‘novice employees send work out to the customers so it must be perfect’ (IE2). The changing workplace demands that ‘learning to write in the workplace entails getting plugged into a system of endless learning rather than gaining a bounded set of ideas’ (Winsor, 2001: 6).

This is not to say that there is no learning in the workplace. Work and learning are inextricably linked and work occurs within communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that are in effect learning groups. People learn through participating with others and learning involves changes in knowledge and action (Winsor, 2001) enabling participation in the communities of practice offered by a particular profession (Ericsson, Krampe & Tesch-Römer, 1993).

### **6.3 Students as writers: HE and the workplace**

This section deals with the students as writers in HE and as novice employees in the workplace. Students’ and academics’ perceptions of students’ writing abilities in the HE context and evaluations of the novice employees’ writing performance in the workplace are compared under the headings below.

#### 6.3.1 Students as writers in HE: struggling to transfer knowledge

In this sub-section the profile of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year Communication students and the self-evaluation of their writing abilities are presented.

In the HE context the medium of learning is English. The majority of students speak Xhosa and Afrikaans as their home languages and a minority speak English as their home language (refer to Figure 4.5). ESL learners experience lexico-grammatical difficulties (Leki, 2003) such as, ‘students cannot write paragraphs’ (A3) and they are influenced by the role which cultural norms play on their

acquisition of business writing skills (Winberg et al., 2005). Some students have part-time work experience and some have been exposed to business writing genres before entering the HE environment, but many students experience difficulties with academic and business writing and are supported by a mentorship programme, access to tutorials and a Writing Centre. The research findings showed that novice employees in the workplace context required and received mentorship and support from the employers, that was different from the kinds of feedback given to students in HE.

The majority of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students believe that they have the ability to produce the business writing documents practised in the communication classrooms when they enter the workplace. The majority of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students also considered competency in business writing skills to be essential to their success in the workplace (refer to Table 4.3 for the results). Students also believe that the business writing in which they participate in HE is adequate and necessary for them to enter the workplace (refer to Table 4.1 for the results). Assessment results show that students usually perform better during their 2<sup>nd</sup> year of studies.

In the HE context, in order to simulate workplace writing practices, students are often provided with opportunities to practise writing individually and in collaboration with their peers in the classrooms. Almost half of the 1<sup>st</sup> year students and more than half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year students consider their writing skills to be strong and reported that ‘I am a fast learner and always in the mood to learn new things’ (y92) and ‘we did mostly business writing skills for the year, so I think it’s strong’ (y109). Such active involvement in the assessment experience ‘promotes the acquisition of life-long skills’ (Ballantyne, Hughes & Mylonas, 2002: 428) enabling students to learn independently after graduation (Boud & Falchikov, 2006).

A major difference between students as writers in the HE context and novice employees as writers in the workplace context is that students are usually required to produce business writing from scratch. For example, the writing of a notice and agenda, without access to the lesser genres, such as e-mail messages of agenda items. Students practise the writing of messages in a simulated workplace context and do not, for example, take messages from a client over the telephone. This may account for the difficulties that students experience in transferring writing knowledge and skills learned in the communication classroom to other subjects within the OMT programme and ultimately to the workplace (Dannels, 2003; Paretto, 2006).

### 6.3.2 Novice employees as writers: struggling to make transition to workplace

In this sub-section the profile of the novice employees and evaluations of their writing abilities are presented.

Three of the novice employees were ESL learners and three spoke English as their home language. The novice employees held the positions of Assistant Administration Clerk, Personal Assistant, Administrative Assistant, Debtors Clerk, Receptionist and Intern Administrator. They were required to speak and write in English as the language of business and mainly used Afrikaans and Xhosa for oral communication purposes in response to customer queries or telephone calls. Both the HE and workplace contexts in this study predominantly used English as the medium of education and/or the language of business.

Novice employees were required to be involved with producing a variety of business documents and to continue with a variety of other duties at the same time. Most of the novice employees had a business-like approach to the production of writing by meeting deadlines and working ‘accurately and quickly’ (IE5). They produced writing individually and in collaboration with other employees and were required to ‘check everything’ (IE4) they produced. The novice employees were required to produce writing in the highly computerised workplace environments and most of the employers considered the students’ electronic communication skills to be ‘excellent, better than the present staff’ (IE1).

Some of the novice employees had difficulties making the transition from the HE context to the workplace context and did not know how to put their knowledge into practice. In some instances they still viewed themselves as students instead of novice employees and needed to be ‘less immature’ (IE4) and ‘required supervision’ (IE2). Most of the employers provided mentorship and support for the novice employees during their experiential training.

Novice employees have access to, and can rely on, the ‘lesser’ genres such as e-mail memoranda in the production of ‘major genres’ such as workplace reports (Winberg, 2007). Spinuzzi and Zachry (2000) refer to this concept as ‘genre ecology’ and Yates and Orlikowshi (2002) describe this process as a range of texts which are drawn on in the production of a new text connecting each text to the previous text in a sequential chain of ‘textual pathways’. This is a major difference between students as writers in HE and novice employees as writers in the workplace.

#### **6.4 Genres of writing: HE and workplace**

This section describes the different writing genres in HE and the workplace.

##### 6.4.1 Genres in HE: preparation and practice

This sub-section describes the genres of writing in HE, namely, academic, professional and electronic.

### *Academic writing genres*

The types of academic genres which students are required to produce are note and instruction taking, summary writing, essay and assignment writing, and they are taught referencing skills.

### *Business writing genres*

The types of business writing sub-genres which students are required to learn are: the writing of memoranda, business letters, letters of complaint, enquiries, telephone message forms, covering letters for job applications, CV writing, completion of forms, e-mails, facsimiles, meeting correspondence: notice, agenda and minutes, report writing, questionnaires and interview forms, posters, presentation and speech outlines, letters of invitation and letters of thanks to guest speakers, formal invitations, programmes and menus for events and seminars.

Academics employ a variety of methods to teach students generic formats of business writing and to keep up-to-date with workplace practices. Deliberate practice of both the academic and business writing genres during the 1<sup>st</sup> year of the communication course is necessary as these skills are expanded on during the 2<sup>nd</sup> year. Differentiation in the amount of practice which 1<sup>st</sup> year communication students receive in academic and business writing skills may present both students and academics with additional pressure during the 2<sup>nd</sup> year. Deliberate practice can improve the writing of students when it is undertaken in the context of a 'professionally relevant task domain' (Kellogg, 2008: 18).

### *Electronic communication genres*

Students are required to use computers to produce all academic and business writing for the communication courses, with the exception of class exercises and tests. The electronic communication genres which 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students are required to learn include the Microsoft suite which comprises Microsoft Word, Office, PowerPoint, Excel and Desktop Publishing. Students are also required to use Outlook and the Internet and to learn a financial programme, namely, Pastel.

## 6.4.2 Genres in the workplace: action-oriented writing

### *Business writing genres*

The types of business writing sub-genres which novice employees produced were: bank reconciliations, brochures, CVs, databases, delivery notes, e-mails, facsimiles, invoices, letters, product manuals, marketing and advertising material, memoranda, minutes, notes for training, policy documents, presentations, proposals, quotations, reports, specifications, spreadsheets, stores and customer lists, telephone messages, training needs assessment forms, travel documentation, user guides and website pages.

The business writings sub-genres which were unfamiliar to novice employees and different to those taught in the HE context were: hospital reports, in-house online generated documentation, policy documents, proposals, user guides, product manuals, product specifications, and marketing and advertising materials. Those documents generated by software packages and SAP would not comprise the course content of communication or information administration subjects of the OMT programme as they are specific to the companies at which they are utilised. Novice employees found it difficult to take accurate instructions and messages, and to produce minutes of meetings, labels, SAP documentation and corporate letters to directors. Regular practice and exposure to these genres in the workplace saw improvements in novice employees' writing, such as the minutes of meetings which 'had been a bit tough', but 'now were fine' (N3). While there is the similarity of deliberate practice and exposure to business writing sub-genres in both the HE and workplace contexts, there is a differentiation in the amount of practice which 1<sup>st</sup> year communication students receive in business writing skills and this has implications for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of their studies.

#### *Electronic communication genres*

The electronic communication genres utilised at the companies were: Microsoft software, in-house software, online databases, PowerPoint, SAP, in-house home shopping, MWEB, internet/electronic banking, Outlook, intelligence database for the generation of documents, and internet research. Novice employees are required to be competent in generating business writing mediated by information technologies and it is 'absolutely' (IE3) necessary to their success in the workplace. Only two of the employers felt that the novice employees were unable to meet all of the electronic written communication requirements of their companies.

Both the HE OMT programme and the workplace similarly emphasise proficiency in computer skills and the use of electronic communication genres. There are differences between the electronic communication genres which students are required to learn in HE and those used in some of the workplaces. This was noted in two instances where students were not competent in advanced Excel skills and they did not know how to solve basic computer problems, such as setting up the computer or connecting a printer.

#### **6.5 The audience and purposes of writing: HE and workplace**

In this section the different audiences and purposes of writing in HE and the workplace are compared.

### 6.5.1 The audiences and purposes of writing: academic assessors

The primary purpose for students' writing is to exhibit their knowledge to academics of a subject about which they are not thoroughly informed. The purpose of students' writing is not to explain something to an audience and assessor who do not understand the information, but to 'perform knowledge' (Paretti, 2006: 189) for academics who know more about the subject than the students. The academics do not need the information that students possess, but they need to know that the students have learned and that they possess the knowledge.

The academics evaluate the writing in terms of the knowledge which students should have regarding concepts, genre, subject matter and writing process in order to communicate information to multiple audiences. This difference between HE and the workplace may account for one of the key barriers to the transfer of communication skills from the academic environment to the workplace, as students struggle to shift from using writing to perform knowledge for an evaluator to using writing as a means to exchange important information with audiences (Paretti, 2006).

The secondary purpose of students' business writing in the simulated workplace situations is to communicate with the audiences in the workplace. Students are required to write for the clients, customers and staff of the companies where they would eventually be employed. The academics main focus is that students are able to demonstrate that they understand the theoretical concepts and conventions of professional sub-genres, such as letter writing, can perform the writing skills in accordance with the requirements of the writing process, and can analyse the results in terms appropriate to the communication discipline. In the HE environment, unlike that of the workplace, it is often difficult for students to clearly connect 'the content, structure, tone and visual design of their writing to the real information needs of their audiences' (Paretti, 2006: 190).

The academics required that students meet the specific course requirements, but students are able to pass a written assignment, project or test with 50%. Students also have more than one opportunity to meet the writing outcomes, according to the guidelines of continuous assessment. This is a considerable difference to the requirements of the workplace where novice employees are required to produce 100% accurate writing to meet the specific requirements of multiple audiences.

### 6.5.2 The audiences and purposes of writing: the company and the clients

The primary purpose for the production of business writing in the workplace is to communicate and share information with multiple audiences, to acquire and maintain contracts and to generate income for the organisation. This is in contrast to the primary purpose of HE, which is to acquire knowledge and skills. In the workplace the writer is the authority who writes to convey new or unfamiliar information to an audience who does not know, but needs to know and requires the information.

Writing is used to convey information or to explain something which the customer does not understand.

The audience of the workplace, unlike that of the HE context, evaluates the writing in terms of what is derived and understood from the information that has been conveyed to them (Paretti, 2006). The exchange of correct and accurate information is the main focus of the workplace. Writing is checked and novice employees are required to evaluate their work and have it held up for scrutiny, as one novice employee explained: 'I check and they check any document they request us to type on their behalf' (N2). Research shows that when novice employees enter the workplace, they anticipate an audience who would be evaluating their writing as the academics do, and not in terms of maintaining the interaction between the company and the customers (Winsor, 1996; Paretti, 2006).

Novice employees produce writing for the customers and clients of the company at which they are employed and for the staff at all levels of the company. They produced a variety of writing, such as 'letters...forms, specifications and check lists' (N2) and 'information, brochures and accreditations' (N6) for customers and staff. The workplace demands responsible and effective writers who tailor their writing to meet the needs of the customers and senior staff who rely on the information that is exchanged, in order to make important and often costly decisions. These audiences have specific requirements and 'all work ...has to be perfect' and 'accurate' (N2) as errors may have serious and costly consequences. While the attainment of a 'perfect' piece of work is certainly desirable in HE, it is not mandatory, as a pass mark is equivalent to 50%, or accomplishing only half of the intended outcomes.

The above comparison is summarised in Table 6.1.

## **6.6 Addressing the research questions**

In this section, I return to the questions posed in the first chapter:

1. What are the business writing practices of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year Communication students?
2. What are the business writing practices of office managers?
3. What are the 'gaps' in the business writing practices between HE OMT programmes and related workplaces?
4. How can these gaps be addressed to ensure the adequate preparation of OMT students for the workplaces of the future?

**Table 6.1: Comparative summary of written communication in HE and the workplace**

CONTEXTS OF WRITING: HE	CONTEXTS OF WRITING: WORKPLACE
<u>Primary focus:</u> Acquisition of knowledge and knowledge production	<u>Primary focus:</u> Business of organisation and 'information' sharing
<u>Discourse community:</u> academics and students	<u>Discourse community:</u> employers, staff, customers and clients
<u>HE attempts</u> to simulate workplace <u>Business writing:</u> often 'pedagogized' for learning purposes	<u>Complex realities</u> of writing <u>Specific writing requirements</u> for multiple audiences
<u>Learning context:</u> classrooms, library and study rooms	<u>Busy context:</u> writer needs to produce writing in noisy, active context
<u>Prepare students</u> for acquisition rather than participation in learning. <u>Learning tends</u> to be <u>decontextualised</u>	<u>Learning linked with work</u> and occurs within communities of practice <u>People learn through participating</u> with others
STUDENTS: WRITERS IN HE	NOVICE EMPLOYEES:WRITERS IN WORKPLACE
<u>Student profile:</u> 265 students from 3 campuses <u>Medium of learning:</u> English, but majority ESL learners	<u>Novice employees:</u> 3 ESL learners, 3 English speaking <u>Language of business :</u> English
<u>Mentorship programme,</u> tutorials, Writing Centre, tutors	<u>Mentorship and support</u> provided by employers
<u>Majority students believe they have ability</u> to produce business writing when they enter workplace	<u>Produced: variety business documents</u> and variety of duties
<u>Individually and in collaboration:</u> Practise writing	<u>Individually and in collaboration</u> produce writing
<u>Write from scratch</u> without access to lesser genres	<u>Have access to and rely on</u> 'lesser' genres
<u>Experience difficulties</u> of transfer of writing knowledge to other subjects and ultimately the workplace	
GENRES OF WRITING: HE	GENRES OF WRITING: WORKPLACE
<u>Academic writing</u>	Not applicable
<u>Business writing sub genres:</u> generic formats	<u>Unfamiliar sub-genres:</u> hospital reports, proposals, user guides, product manuals, product specifications, marketing & advertising materials, policy documents <u>Difficulty taking accurate instructions and messages and to produce:</u> labels, minutes, messages, SAP documents, letters to directors
<u>Electronic communication genres:</u> Microsoft suite, Outlook, internet, Pastel. <u>Business writing:</u> students required to produce all writing using computers, except for tests and class exercises <u>Emphasis on proficiency</u> in computer skills and electronic communication genres	<u>Electronic communication genres:</u> Microsoft suite, in- house software, online databases, SAP, MWEB, internet/electronic banking, Outlook, internet research, web page designing. <u>Problems:</u> Need more advanced Excel and basic computer knowledge <u>Emphasis on proficiency</u> in computer skills and electronic communication genres
<u>Variety teaching methods</u> of generic formats <u>Differentiations</u> in the amount of practice which 1 <sup>st</sup> yr students receive for academic and business writing <u>Deliberate practice:</u> students' writing can improve	<u>Writing mediated by information technologies</u> <u>Regular practice</u> and exposure  <u>Deliberate practice:</u> novice employees' writing can improve
AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE: HE	AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE: WORKPLACE
<u>Academics/assessors:</u> need to know students possess knowledge  <u>Academics/assessors:</u> know more than students about the subject <u>Primary purpose</u> for student writing is to exhibit and perform knowledge for academics <u>Writers not thoroughly informed</u> of the subject about which they have to exhibit knowledge to the academics	<u>Clients, customers, employers and colleagues:</u> rely on accurate information exchanged <u>Clients &amp; customers:</u> need to know and require information <u>Purpose for writing</u> is the communication and sharing of information with multiple audiences <u>Writer is authority:</u> conveys new or unfamiliar information
<u>Academics evaluate</u> the knowledge students should have <u>Barrier to knowledge transfer:</u> students writing to perform knowledge for academics and not to exchange information	<u>Audiences evaluate writing</u> by what is derived and understood <u>Main focus:</u> exchange of correct and accurate information
<u>Secondary purpose</u> for writing in simulated workplace environment is to communicate with audiences in workplace. <u>Difficult for students:</u> to write to meet real needs of audiences.	<u>Novice employees tailor writing</u> to meet needs of audiences
<u>Academics requirements:</u> students may pass writing with 50% <u>More than one opportunity</u> to meet writing outcomes	<u>Meet specific requirements of audience:</u> 100% accurate as errors may have serious and costly consequences

### 6.6.1 What are the business writing practices of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year Communication students?

The business writing practices of students are dictated by the curriculum requirements of the communication courses. They are allocated three contact hours per week where academics attempt to simulate the workplace environment and demonstrate the business writing sub-genres which would be required for use in the workplace. The 1<sup>st</sup> year students are required to acquire basic writing skills that are further developed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year. Students are required to produce a variety of business writing sub-genres, such as letters, reports and so on for the purpose of providing information to the assumed audiences of their business writing, namely, the customers, clients and staff of companies by whom they will be employed. The real audiences are the academics who evaluate the writing according to the knowledge which students need to develop in order to produce business writing. Research shows that these differences of audiences and purposes of writing in the HE and workplace contexts create a barrier to the transfer of writing skills from the academic environment to the workplace (Paretti, 2006).

The cognitive demands of writing requires that students know how to plan, generate and review their writing by using problem-solving skills, retrieving information from memory, displaying audience awareness, using appropriate language and the rhetorical style required in a specific domain (Kellogg, 2001). Projects, assignments and tests are continuously assessed and students are provided with more than one opportunity to meet the writing outcomes of the course. The classroom environment provides students with opportunities to practise their business writing individually and collaboratively and academics make use of up-to-date and current case-studies, scenarios and exercises to simulate the workplace context. Mentorship and support is provided to those students who have difficulty producing the business writing or achieving the assessment requirements.

In preparing students to acquire knowledge, the learning of business writing can become pedagogized and decontextualised and unrelated to the complex realities of the workplace (Russell, 1997; Boud & Falchikov, 2006). Research on university preparation for workplace writing concludes that the classroom environment can enhance the students' development as writers by providing them with the following: experience in peer and collaborative writing, helpful feedback on their writing including attention to matters of style and correctness, instruction and practice in common workplace genres, and relevant research and analytical skills (Schneider & Andre, 2005).

Students are required to be competent in the use of electronic communication genres and in an attempt to simulate workplace practices, all writing, with the exception of tests, must be produced by computer. HE attempts to prepare students for the communication responsibilities in the workplace (Miller, Larsen & Gaitens, 1996) and for the future. Writing for the future is viewed as becoming more closely integrated with other media as 'texts mediated by information technologies are at the core of the information revolution' (Geisler et al., 2001: 270).

### 6.6.2 What are the business writing practices of office managers?

Information is the 'critical currency' of the modern workplace (Paretti, 2006: 189) and novice employees are required to know how to exchange it effectively with the multiple audiences of the complex workplace realities. Writers are required to provide and share new and unfamiliar information with the customers and clients, the external audiences of their writing in the workplace. They also share and exchange information with senior staff and colleagues, who are the internal audiences of their writing. Novice employees are required to be aware of the legal requirements that govern their writing, such as: confidentiality, the need to keep accurate records, and an awareness of the levels of formality, etiquette and accuracy of genres utilised in the workplace. They are required to have good writing skills and need to adapt to the specific requirements of the workplace, such as the meeting of deadlines and satisfying multiple audiences with specific needs.

Novice employees join a discourse community and to be successful writers in the workplace they need to understand the various expectations and needs of the external and internal audiences for whom they will be writing. They are required to produce writing in a busy context, but cannot be distracted by the activity of the workplace. They are required to adapt to new and unfamiliar writing genres and to produce writing individually and in collaboration with others in the workplace. Competency in the use of information technologies is essential as the workplace demands rapid production of documentation and the creation of online texts. They are required to be polite and competent communicators and to review their writing to ensure it is accurate.

To be effective writers in the workplace, novice employees require knowledge of the business of the company on whose behalf they exchange information with customers and clients. They require knowledge of the business writing genres of the workplace and how to plan, research, draft and revise their writing. They also require rhetorical knowledge of the purpose of the writing and the audience who will read the writing, and self-awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of their own writing abilities (Walters, Hunter & Giddens, 2007). Novice employees required mentorship and supervision, and the role of supervisors and managers as mentors of workplace writing, is considered essential to the development of effective business writing in the workplace (Speck, 1990).

Research undertaken on university preparation for workplace writing concludes that communication students appeared to have the strongest preparation for workplace writing and that the instruction and practice in business writing sub-genres, such as report writing, prepare students for writing in the workplace and act as a flexible set of guidelines in composing text (Schneider & Andre, 2005).

### 6.6.3 What are the 'gaps' in the business writing practices between HE OMT programmes and related workplaces?

A unique context for learning exists in HE and is influenced by the requirements of educational policy, teaching methods, curricula and assessment criteria. This may influence the students' acquisition of business writing skills as research shows that writing expertise is domain dependent as writers master the rhetorical style required in a given domain (Kellogg, 2006). Gaps in the business writing practices of HE and the workplace lie with the contrasting requirements of the HE context and the workplace context. The HE context requires that students produce writing to 'perform knowledge' (Paretti, 2006) and tailor their writing to meet the needs of the academics and assessors. Novice employees enter the complex realities of the workplace with the genre knowledge they need to produce in an academic setting, but lack the rhetorical and discourse community knowledge needed to adapt these formats to the audiences of the workplace (Paretti, 2006). Students struggle to shift from using writing to perform knowledge for an evaluator to using writing as a means to exchange important information with audiences (Paretti, 2006).

Some of the novice employees in this study had not adjusted to the transition from HE to the workplace and lacked confidence and maturity, and had difficulty conceptualising the politics of the office environment. They did not know how to put their knowledge into practice and did not view themselves as novice employees in a work environment. Novice employees experienced difficulty with telephone techniques and etiquette, producing minutes of meetings, meeting due dates, and taking accurate instructions and messages. The business documents with which the novice employees had difficulty or were unable to produce, were: labels, SAP generated documentation and corporate letters to directors. Novice employees met most of the electronic communication genre requirements of the workplace, but did not have advanced knowledge of Excel skills and basic computer skills, such as the setting up of a computer. It would appear that the performance of students in HE may be acceptable and good enough to meet the course requirements, but these performances may not be of the standard required to meet the demands of the workplace. Novice employees still need supervision and support.

The business writings which were not produced according to the business writing formats and structures as taught in the communication courses at the HE sites were: hospital reports, in-house online generated documentation, policy documents, proposals, user guides, product manuals, product specifications, and marketing and advertising materials. Those documents generated by software packages and SAP would not comprise the Communication 1 and 11 or Information Administration course contents as they are specific to the organisations at which they are utilised.

## **6.7 How can these gaps be addressed to ensure the adequate preparation of OMT students for the workplaces of the future?**

The suggestions made by novice employees and the employers for improvements to the OMT programme in order to improve business writing skills, are presented in this section.

### 6.7.1 Novice employees' evaluation of the OMT programme

Only two novice employees made suggestions for improvements which the OMT academic staff could introduce to the course or methodology in order to improve their business writing skills in preparation for the workplace. The first novice employee suggested that 'more written work, presentations and group work' (N3) could be undertaken and the second novice employee suggested that 'more work on Microsoft Outlook' should be done and that 'the writing of proposals' (N6) should be included in the communication curriculum. A third novice employee made suggestions for improvements to the oral communication component of the communication courses and requested additional training on telephone skills because 'I found it difficult to talk to directors of other companies' (N2). The need for deliberate practice is central to the development of business writing skills and expert performance (Ericsson, Krampe & Tesch-Römer, 1993; Kellogg, 2008) and therefore is essential to the preparation of OMT novice employees for the workplace.

### 6.7.2 Employers' evaluation of the OMT programme

Suggestions for improvements to the OMT programme in order to improve business writing skills were that novice employees need: 'additional training on how to make travel arrangements and on how to prioritise urgent telephone messages' (IE5); 'to be encouraged to proofread, to check their own work and to use spell check' (IE3); 'to build confidence ...use role-play and team building exercises to build their confidence' (IE2); and 'to learn the basics of SAP' (IE4).

Suggestions for improvements of the OMT programme regarding the electronic genres which novice employees should be taught were that 'there is no lack of skill and training, but novice employees must do 'Access' before they start the experiential training' (IE2); 'novice employees should also be taught MS Office Advanced level' (IE4); and that 'novice employees should also be taught Excel Outlook and animation' (IE5).

## **6.8 Recommendations**

The recommendations based on the findings, as well as the feedback from the novice employees and employers are as follows:

### 6.8.1 Extended first year OMT programme

There is considerable variance in students' education levels and communication abilities prior to their entry into HE. These differences in students' writing skills, especially those of the 1<sup>st</sup> year students, are issues of concern for the academic staff. Many students are not adequately prepared for HE, and there is a gap between their communication abilities and the demands, expectations and requirements of the OMT programme. These factors suggest the need to 'introduce a bridging course' (A1). The current HE policy in South Africa (Council of HE, 2004) recommends an extended first year programme to help students, particularly those for whom English is an additional language, to develop the necessary skills for the programme.

### 6.8.2 Curriculum for business writing

While the existing OMT curriculum covers most of the basics, there are always new developments that need to be accommodated. For example, this research indicates that the writing of proposals needs to be added to the communication curriculum. There needs to be more field work opportunities in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year Communication courses, such as site visits, job-shadowing and voluntary work, perhaps linked to a service-learning project.

The field of information technology changes constantly and there is a need for HE to not only keep up with business practices, but to innovate in this regard. HE students should be taking advanced ICT knowledge into the workplace. Students should not be prepared for the current workplace, but for the future workplace (Miller, Larsen & Gaitens, 1996; Boud & Solomon, 2001; Geisler et al., 2001; Barnett, 2004).

Graduate OMT students are employed in a wide variety of fields (including advertising, tourism, medical, insurance, legal, as well as in the general business areas) – as a result, the curriculum cannot meet the specific requirements of all these fields. For example, OMT students learn generic report writing skills, and not how to write a specific hospital report. As a result, teaching for transfer is particularly important (Fogarty, Perkins & Barell, 1992; James, 2006).

### 6.8.3 Pedagogy for teaching business writing

There is a need for effective classroom-based interventions to facilitate competent business writing activities which include teaching students the habits which foster success in business writing, such as perseverance, researching, drafting, revising (Walters, Hunter & Giddens, 2007) and deliberate practice (Kellogg, 2008). Many of the students surveyed acknowledged that they received insufficient practice in business writing genres. Kellogg (2008) believes that it is possible to train writers so that planning, generation and reviewing can each become relatively automatic. The classroom can also

enhance an appreciation for the socially situated nature of genres and genre acquisition. (Schneider & Andre, 2005).

The theoretical demands of the course often result in the overlap of theoretical content being taught during the practical periods. More role-play, group work, presentations and case-studies are needed in the OMT classrooms.

Training students to shift from working in a specific-to-general way (Piaget, 1985) to working within a general-to-specific frame of reference is important in the light of the considerable variation in workplace writing contexts and genres (refer to 6.8.2 above).

#### 6.8.4 Student confidence

Employers, academic staff and students themselves point to the need for students to develop personal skills related to their levels of self-confidence. These skills include: oral communication (telephone skills in particular), instruction and message taking, presentation, language etiquette, appropriate use of tone and register, and general life skills – such as asking questions, seeking clarification, coping with pressure, dealing with ‘office politics’, meeting deadlines, decision making and team-work. An employer reported that novice employees ‘lacked confidence...we expect a lot of them’ (IE4) and a novice employee stated that ‘I need to practise to deal with directors on the telephone’ (N2).

#### 6.8.5 Assessment of business writing genres

The methods of assessment in HE have to meet the needs of modern workplaces. Research shows that ‘much current assessment is inadequate to help prepare students for a lifetime of learning’ (Boud & Falchikov, 2005: 1). New methods of assessment must take into account the need for life-long learning, reflective thinking, self-evaluation skills and problem-solving skills. Innovative assessment methods, such as peer and self-evaluation methods, prepare students for the tasks of making judgements and decisions about their own work, as they will be required to do when they enter the workplace. Active involvement in the assessment experience ‘promotes the acquisition of life-long skills’ (Ballantyne, Hughes & Mylonas, 2002: 428) which goes beyond HE for students’ future learning and assessment careers.

#### 6.8.6 Academic staff development

Many of these recommendations imply the need for academic staff development; communication lecturers need to be both competent teachers of English for Academic Purposes (Krazanowski, 2001) as well as competent business communication educators (Sharples & Van der Geest, 1996; Miller, Larsen & Gaitens, 1996). They also need to be aware of differences between these two forms of communication, as well as the hybrid forms that develop when workplace genres are simulated in HE.

Academic staff must remain current with workplace writing practices so that they may make use of innovative methods to simulate these practices in the classroom to prepare students for the workplace (Jeong et al., 2000). Class work and assignments that enable students to enact the practices of the workplace and adapt the writing sub-genres to the needs of the individual audiences should be developed (Paretti, 2006).

## **6.9 Contribution of this research**

The contribution of this research comprises a theoretical contribution to communication knowledge as well as a number of practical contributions to improve the way in which business writing is taught.

### 6.9.1 Knowledge contribution

This study has developed a theoretical framework for the analysis and comparison of HE and workplace communication data. The comparative study has shown the differences between HE and workplace communication. HE and workplaces are different and their communication practices need to embody these significant differences, while at the same time ensuring that learning can be transferred to the work context. This study has shown where there can be constructive alignment between HE and workplace communication practices for the benefit of both student learning and workplaces.

### 6.9.2 Practical contribution

The implementation of the recommendations in section 6.8 above should result in OMT students being better prepared to face the demands and challenges of the different and complex world of the workplace into which they will enter on completion of their studies.

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**QUESTIONNAIRE: BUSINESS WRITING PRACTICES**

I am undertaking research in order to establish whether there are gaps with regard to the preparation of Office Management and Technology (OMT) students for the world of work. This research aims to investigate business writing practices in the workplace and the teaching and learning practices within the OMT departments of Universities of Technology.

Your responses to this questionnaire will provide valuable information which will assist me in improving the Office Management and Technology course.

**A. GENERAL:**

- 1. Are you a 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year student?.....
- 2. Campus:.....

**B. PERSONAL DETAILS:**

- 1. What is your home language?  
.....

- 2. Do you have any part-time work experience?  
.....

If your answer is 'yes' please give a brief description.

.....

.....

.....

- 3. Have you made use of business writing skills in your work experience?  
.....

If your answer is 'yes' to the above question please provide details of the type of writing skills you used.

.....

.....

.....

.....

4. If you answer 'yes' to the question above please indicate the extent of such experience, e.g. number of weeks or months.

.....  
.....

5. Were you taught business writing skills in High School or any other institution? .....  
If your answer is 'yes' to the above question please provide details of what course you studied prior to your admission to the Office Management and Technology course at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

6. Would you consider your business writing skills to be weak or strong?

.....

Give reasons for your answer to the above question.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

7. Do you consider competency in business writing skills to be essential to your success in the workplace?.....

Please give a reason for your answer.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**C. WRITING PRACTICES**

8. Which of the following written business practices have you practised in your communication course? Tick the relevant columns.

<b>BUSINESS WRITING PRACTICE</b>	<b>Only read in textbook/notes</b>	<b>Practised in class, tests, homework, projects, assignments</b>	<b>Not practised</b>
1. Note & instruction taking			
2. Summary writing			
3. Essay and assignment writing			
4. Writing Memoranda			
5. Business letters: letters of complaint, enquiry etc.			
6. Telephone message forms			
7. Covering letters for job applications			
8. CV writing			
9. Completion of forms			
10. Writing e-mails			
11. Facsimile writing			
12. Meeting correspondence: Notice, agenda, minutes			
13. Report writing			
14. Formulation of questionnaires, interview forms			
15. Posters, presentation outlines			
16. Letters of invitation, letters of thanks to guests			
17. Formal invitations			
18. Programmes for events and seminars			
19. Menus for events and seminars			
20. Speech outlines			

9. Do you believe that you will be able to produce the business writing documents which you practised in the classroom when you enter the workplace?.....

If your answer is 'no' to the above question, please give reasons for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

.....  
.....  
.....

10. Please list any additional business writing practices you have participated in as part of the communication course.

.....  
.....  
.....

11. Do you believe the business writing practices you have learned in the communication course are adequate preparation for you to enter the business world?.....

If your answer is 'no' to the above question please list those writing practices which you believe you should be taught to enable you to be competent in the workplace.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

12. Do you think that you will make use of SMSs as a business writing practice when you enter the workplace?

.....  
.....

If your answer is 'yes' to the above question please give a reason for your answer.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

13. Do you believe that all the business writing practices taught to you in the communication course are necessary in the workplace?

.....

If your answer is 'no' to the above question please list those practices you believe to be unnecessary in the workplace.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for taking the time and making the effort to complete this questionnaire.

S. Hollis-Turner

Lecturer: Communication

## Appendix B

### CLASSROOM OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Academic in action:

Date:

Venue:

Description of task:

Number of students in class:

Level:

Length of observation: hrs mins

		Most Often	Often	Seldom	Not at all	Comments
1	Is there interaction between the academic and students?					
2	Does the academic make use of teaching aids: OHP/textbooks, etc?					
3	Does the academic demonstrate the business writing skill?					
4	Does the academic model workplace writing practices?					
5	Does the academic model academic writing practices?					
6	Do students have access to notes/textbooks/examples of the writing?					
7	Are students encouraged to evaluate their writing?					
8	Are students allowed to draw on the expertise and experience of their peers?					
9	Does the academic assist those students who have difficulty practising the written skill?					
10	Are students given opportunities to apply their knowledge?					
11	Do students get homework providing an additional opportunity for them to practise the writing skill?					
12	Are students required to adhere to deadlines for the submission of written documents?					
13	Are students required to have a business-like approach to class work activities?					
14	Are students required to work on group writing activities?					
15	Are students required to give brief and business like report backs?					

**A. GENERAL: COMMUNICATION ACADEMICS**

Name:

Campus:

Do you lecture 1<sup>st</sup> /2<sup>nd</sup> year/both students?

What is your home language?

Give a brief description of your career and work experience:

**B. BUSINESS WRITING PRACTICES**

1. What academic writing skills do you teach the OMT students?
2. What methods do you employ to teach academic writing skills?
3. Do you model academic writing practices in the classroom? Please elaborate.
4. Do you believe that students are given sufficient time/reinforcement in communication classes and also in the classes of other subjects within the programme to practise academic writing skills? Please elaborate.
5. What business writing skills do you teach OMT students?
6. What methods do you employ to teach business writing skills?
7. Do you model business writing practices in the classroom? Please elaborate.
8. Do you believe that students are given sufficient time/reinforcement in communication classes and also in the classes of other subjects within the programme to practise business writing skills? Please elaborate.
9. What teaching aids do you make use of in the communication classroom and how appropriate/authentic are the texts/examples used?
10. Do you think that you follow good communication/business writing practices in the classroom? Please elaborate.
11. Are students required to have a business-like approach to class work activities? Please elaborate on methods used.
12. Do you believe that the inclusion of electronic written communications is necessary for the success of the OMT students in the workplace? Please describe which of these methods are included in your course and how they are presented.
13. What are your views on the use of SMSs as a business writing practice?
14. What are your views on voice mail and digital voice recording as business writing practice?
15. Are students given opportunities to evaluate their writing and to work in groups? Please elaborate.

**Appendix D OBSERVATION SCHEDULE FOR NOVICE EMPLOYEES**

Company:

Manager:

Date:

Position held:

Name of novice employee:

Length of observation: hrs mins

Written documentation being produced:

		Most often	Often	Seldom	Not at all	Comments
1	Is there interaction between the employer and novice employee?					
2	Is the novice employee involved with producing electronic written documentation?					
3	Does the novice employee have to use voice mail/digital voice recording in order to produce business documentation?					
4	Does the novice employee have a business-like approach to the production of the business writing documentation?					
5	Does the novice employee evaluate the written documentation produced in the workplace?					
6	Does the novice employee have to make corrections to any of the written documentation produced?					
7	Does the novice employee adhere to deadlines for the production of the written documentation?					
8	Is the novice employee required to make use of any languages other than English in the production of written documentation?					
9	Is the novice employee involved with other duties while trying to produce the written documentation?					
10	Does the novice employee have to obtain clarification from the employer in order to produce the written documentation?					
11	Is the novice employee required to forward the written documentation to customers/clients etc?					
12	Is the novice employee required to make use of SMSs as a business writing practice?					
13	Is the novice employee required to work with other staff members on the production of written documentation?					

**A. GENERAL: EMPLOYERS**

Name: (To be kept confidential)

Focus of the company:

Employer:

Date:

**B. BUSINESS WRITING PRACTICES**

1. What is the language of business in your company?
2. Are any other languages used? If so, please elaborate.
3. What types of written documents are used in your company?
4. In your experience, which of these documents do novice employees find difficult to produce?
5. Please elaborate on those business writing documents which OMT novice employees were unable to produce?
6. Which of these business documents have novice employees been able to produce to your satisfaction?
7. What do you feel the OMT academics at the CPUT should focus on in their training with regard to written communication?
8. Which electronic written communications are utilised in your company?
9. Do you think that the novice employees are able to meet the electronic written communication requirements of your company? If not, please elaborate.
10. Do you believe that the novice employees have a business-like approach to the production of the business writing documentation required at your workplace?
11. Do you believe that the inclusion of electronic written communications in the OMT course is necessary for the success of the novice employees in the workplace? If so please elaborate on those you believe should be included in the course.
12. What are your views on the use of SMSs as a business writing practice?
13. What are your views on voice mail and digital voice recording as business writing practice?
14. Are novice employees given opportunities to evaluate their writing and to rectify any errors they have made in their written communication documentation? Please elaborate.
15. Do you have any suggestions with regard to ways in which the lecturers of the OMT department at the CPUT can make changes to the programme or methodology in order to improve on the business writing skills of the novice employees?

**A. GENERAL: NOVICE EMPLOYEES ON EXPERIENTIAL TRAINING**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (To be kept confidential) Employer: \_\_\_\_\_

**B. BUSINESS WRITING PRACTICES**

1. What is the language of business in your company?
2. Are any other languages used? If so, please elaborate.
3. Are you involved with the production of electronic written communications in your company? If your answer is yes, please elaborate on the documents which you have produced.
4. Do you tend to produce written documentation as an individual or in collaboration with other employees? If your answer is that you collaborate with others, please elaborate on how this is done.
5. Are there documents which you have found difficult to produce or were unable to produce? If your answer is yes, please elaborate.
6. Do you have regular interaction with the employer on the production of written communication?
7. Do you have to obtain clarification from the employer in order to produce the written documentation?
8. Are you required to be involved with other duties while trying to produce the written documentation? If your answer is yes, please elaborate.
9. Are you required to work with other staff members on the production of written documentation?
10. Are you required to forward the written documentation produced to customers/clients?
11. Do you adhere to the deadlines which are set for the production of the written documentation? If your answer is no, please elaborate.
12. Are you required to make use of SMSs as a business writing practice?
13. Do you have to make use of voice mail and digital voice recording in order to produce business documentation?
14. Does anyone check your writing? If your answer is yes, please elaborate on who checks your writing and how this takes place.
15. Do you have to make corrections to the written documentation you produce before the document is sent further?
16. Are there any improvements which the lecturers of the OMT course at the CPUT can make to the course or methodology in order to improve your business writing skills in preparation for the workplace? If your answer is yes, please elaborate.

**QUESTION 1 COMPREHENSION****(10 MARKS)****1.1 Read the text below, and then answer the questions that follow.****ZAMBIA TO START ZIM-STYLE DEMOLITION OF SHANTY TOWNS**

The Zambian government has announced plans to demolish dozens of illegal settlements, prompting warnings of a humanitarian disaster for the thousands who face being left homeless. Information Minister Vernon Mwaanga said yesterday that President Levy Mwanawasa's cabinet had endorsed the programme to destroy dozens of illegal shanty towns that have mushroomed in urban areas recently, especially in the capital, Lusaka.

Mwaanga told reporters yesterday that the government would continue with the demolitions already started by the local authority in Lusaka with the backing of the cabinet.

"The exercise will not be restricted to Lusaka alone but will include all towns throughout the country. We will use whatever means necessary to enforce and uphold the law."

Neighbouring Zimbabwe carried out a similar exercise in 2005. Dubbed Operation Murambatsvina (Drive Out Filth), it left thousands of people homeless and attracted widespread international condemnation, including from the UN.

Joseph Chilengi, executive director of the Zambia-based Africa Internally Displaced Persons' Voice, said the Zambian government's plan risked an even worse humanitarian disaster.

"What we are seeing is phase two of Operation Murambatsvina," he said.

"Zambia is in a very precarious situation. We have a bigger (urban) population; and may end up worse than Zimbabwe. The decision by the government will create a terrible humanitarian crisis, which will reverse the economic gains the country has achieved in recent years."

John Banda, chairman of the residents of Kaliliki, one of the Lusaka shanty towns to be demolished, said the government's move was illogical as most of the shanties had been in existence for decades. "We are shocked with this decision. We shall defend ourselves because some of us bought these plots where we built houses," Banda said.

Others have questioned the rationale of the government to carry out such an exercise during the rainy season when several hundred Zambians have already been displaced by floods.

"There is a need to deal with this problem in a more humane and compassionate way," read the editorial in The Post, Zambia's only private daily. – Sapa-AFP

**Cape Times 9 March 2007**

**Read each of the following questions carefully before you answer it:**

- 1.1.1 Explain the similarity between Zambia and Zimbabwe in this article. (2)
- 1.1.2 What was the name of this demolition project carried out by Zimbabwe in 2005 and what does it mean? (2)
- 1.1.3 What was the outcome of this operation? (2)
- 1.1.4 Explain why it is believed that such an operation in Zambia will result in the country ending up worse than Zimbabwe. (2)
- 1.1.5 What is your opinion of the demolition operations discussed in this article? (2)

**1.2 FACSIMILE (15 MARKS)**

You are Joseph Chilengi, executive director of the Displaced Persons' Voice organization. Send a fax to John Banda, chairman of the residents of Kaliliki, one of the Lusaka shanty towns to be demolished, inviting him to a meeting to discuss the problems created by the proposed displacements. Use the fax form provided to give Mr Banda all the details of the meeting. Your opening paragraph (3 – 4 lines) should give insight as to why the meeting is being held. Add the other required details.

<b>COMPANY LETTERHEAD</b>	
<b>To:</b>	<b>From:</b>
<b>Fax:</b>	<b>Pages:</b>
<b>Company:</b>	<b>Date:</b>

**QUESTION 2 BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE (15 MARKS)**

**BIG FOODMARKET**

P O BOX 10  
CAPE TOWN  
6000

Tel: 021 123456

Fax: 021 789123

3 February 2007

Our Ref: 17518

MRS J STEWART

P.O. BOX 164  
DURBANVILLE  
7550

Dear Mrs Stewart

**YOUR COMPLAINT REGARDING BABY POTATOES**

Thank you very much for your letter of 20 January bringing your complaint to our attention. Please accept our apologies for the disappointment and inconvenience caused.

Your complaint has been discussed with our technologist who has informed me that we did experience a problem with the potatoes. We are now obtaining potatoes from another supplier and are closely monitoring their quality.

We understand that you have received an exchange for the potatoes and trust that the matter was dealt with to your satisfaction.

Thank you once again for the interest and trouble you have taken in reporting this matter to us.

Assuring you of our best attention at all times.

C. M. DEKEL (MRS)

Yours truly

CUSTOMER LIAISON OFFICER

2. Study the letter from Big Foodmarket and answer the following questions:
- 2.1 Identify at least four errors of format. Identify the problem and motivate your answers. (4)
- 2.2 There are seven (7) Cs which serve as an easy-to-remember guide to good business correspondence. Identify three (3) of these qualities in the letter and motivate your answers by making references to the letter. (6)
- 2.3 What is the register of this letter? (1)
- 2.4 Identify two (2) language errors in the letter. (2)
- 2.5 Do you think this letter meets the requirements of a good business letter? Motivate your answer. (2)

**QUESTION 3 PARAGRAPH (15 MARKS)**

Your notes “Guidelines to Academic Assignment Writing” discuss eight (8) steps in the assignment writing process. Write a paragraph (10 – 15 lines) in which you discuss the steps you take when you are given an assignment to prepare and submit on a specific date.

**QUESTION 4 REFERENCING (5 MARKS)**

You have studied a book which is entitled “How to Write a Research Paper” and you have made reference to it in your assignment. The author is P. Barry and it was published in 1986 by Pergamon Press, Oxford. Write the reference of this book for your bibliography.

**QUESTION 1****(20 MARKS)**

**READ THE FOLLOWING CASE STUDY AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS THAT FOLLOW:**

*Communication takes place between people and therefore the personalities of those involved can help or hinder the process of communication.*

*Not only do we observe, but we have moods and feelings which vary from day to day, and we can be influenced by a number of factors, such as feeling unwell, **BEING INVOLVED IN DOMESTIC PROBLEMS, HAVING ANXIETIES ABOUT A HOST OF THINGS**, the nature and response of the person we are communicating with and so on. Since we are all susceptible to many influences, our reception and interpretation of information are likely to be biased, one way or another. If we add to these factors our own individual prejudices, largely acquired in childhood, we can begin to see the kind of problems which arise when we try to get our ideas over to others.*

*Underlying all communication there is also a translation problem, for both the sender and receiver of a message. The sender has to translate his ideas into words or pictures, or some other medium); the receiver has to retranslate the received information into ideas.*

Here follow the questions:

- 1.1 Name the communication barrier referred to in the bold section in the case study. (1)
- 1.2 “The sender has to translate his ideas into words, etc.” To what step in the communication process does the author refer here? (1)
- 1.3 To what step in the communication process does he refer when he says: “the receiver has to RETRANSLATE the received information into ideas”? (1)
- 1.4 How will the sender know whether the ideas received are similar enough to make communication effective? (1)
- 1.5 Misunderstanding can arise through a variety of causes. You have already mentioned ONE of those causes in your answer to number (1.1). (1)

Now write down THREE other types of interferences which can occur in the communication process and give an example of each. (6)

- 1.6 Lecturer A teaches a particular course to students in a classroom situation. Lecturer B teaches the same course but through correspondence. Refer to a model of the communication process. Which lecturer would find his role as SENDER more difficult and why? (3)
- 1.7 Communication is often ineffective because the sender chooses the wrong channel to transmit the message. (3)

For each of the following situations say which channel(s) you would use, and give a good reason for your answer.

- 1.7.1 As manager you have to inform a member of your staff that he is going to be retrenched. (2)
- 1.7.2 You are in a management position. A valued client has e-mailed to you a serious complaint regarding service in your organization. You now need to respond. (2)
- 1.8 In the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph the author says “*our reception and interpretation of information are likely to be biased.....*” (3)
- Explain what this means.

**QUESTION 2**

**(15 MARKS)**

**Read the following passage and then answer the questions which follow in YOUR OWN WORDS. Answer in FULL SENTENCES.**

**LISTENING IS A LOST ART**

Many misunderstandings occur because of poor listening habits: between friends, husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees.

Studies show that ideas can be changed by as much as 80% as they pass through the various channels in an organization.

The failure to listen bears extraordinary costs not only in rands, but in time, relationships and productivity. Letters may have to be retyped, appointments re-scheduled, shipments rerouted.

With many millions of workers in the country, a single R10 mistake by each of them (as a result of poor listening) can add up to a cost of more than a billion rand a year. Most of us make more than one listening mistake every day.

More than a half century of research in the field shows that we spend 80% of our waking hours communicating. At least 45% of that time is spent listening. For secretaries the average time spent listening is 57%.

In every communication situation, there is a sender (speaker) and receiver (listener). The problem is that there are a great many senders and very few receivers.

A test on business people by Dr Lyman Steil of the University of Minnesota indicated that 95% of people believed that the primary responsibility for success of any communication rested with the speaker.

The people testing very high on Dr Steil’s listening skills test felt that at least 51% of the responsibility for successful communication rested with the listener. After acknowledging that more than half the task of achieving complete communication was their responsibility as listeners, they became less passive and more active in that role.

People from all walks of life crave someone who will listen to them, yet so few of us really listen. It is a major cause of relationship breakups and keeps psychiatric offices busy every day. Many of these patients have no serious problem other than a vital (unfulfilled) need for someone to listen to them.

People who have been listened to tend to better their ideas, abilities, and values. They are generally more emotionally mature, open to their experiences, less defensive, more democratic and less authoritative.

When people are listened to sensitively, they tend to listen to themselves and take more care in clearly expressing their feelings and thoughts. Listening reduces the threat of having one's idea criticized, so the speaker is more likely to feel his or her contributions are worthwhile.

- 2.1 In paragraph 1 the writer refers to "poor listening habits". Give FOUR examples of poor listening habits. (4)
- 2.2 Write down **FOUR** results of poor listening in an organization (as outlined in the above reading passage). Write full sentences. (4)
- 2.3 Who needs to take more responsibility for the success of communication? Quote a phrase or sentence to support your answer. (2)
- 2.4 The passage says: "...they become less passive and more active in that role (of listener)". Explain what you can do to become a more **active** listener. (5)

### **QUESTION 3 (10 MARKS)**

In the future you will be working in a multi-cultural environment.

- 3.1 Explain why ETHNOCENTRISM would create a barrier between you and colleagues of another culture. (2)
- 3.2 Provide examples how each of the following aspects of nonverbal communication could create barriers in an intercultural communication situation in your place of employment:
- 3.2.1 TIME (2)
  - 3.2.2 PROXEMICS (2)
  - 3.2.3 KINESICS (2)
- 3.3 Explain why EMPATHY is an essential element of effective intercultural communication. (2)

### **QUESTION 4 (15 MARKS)**

Imagine that you are in a management position at your place of work. You have noticed that there is conflict and tension among the different cultures employed in your department.

You have now organised a workshop in multi-cultural communication. Mr Brian Tanga, an expert in the field, has been invited as the facilitator of the workshop.

Write a **MEMORANDUM** to your staff motivating them to attend the workshop. (15)

### **QUESTION 5 (10 MARKS)**

Write down in your answer book next to the relevant number only the correct number to complete each of the following statements.

- 5.1 Which of the following statements is not true?

The receiver of a message

- (a) can be called the source of the communication.
- (b) should give feedback to complete the communication.
- (c) decodes a message.
- (d) is involved in interpretation of the message.

5.2 Which of these statements is not true?

- (a) In a face-to-face situation people are senders and receivers simultaneously.
- (b) Verbal communication is the same as oral communication.
- (c) Silence is a form of feedback.
- (d) Feedback need not be in the same medium as the message to which it is a response.

5.3 Choose the incorrect statement:

- (a) Perception is selective.
- (b) Frame of reference and perception are interrelated.
- (c) Perception does not play a role in the decoding process.
- (d) Empathy can help overcome perceptual barriers.

5.4 Choose the incorrect statement:

Acoustic semiology refers to

- (a) audible signals.
- (b) silences.
- (c) icons.
- (d) voice pitch.

5.5 Choose the correct statement:

- (a) Nonverbal communication is the same as body language.
- (b) In the presence of other people it is impossible not to communicate.
- (c) Eye contact is not really important in public speaking.
- (d) Nonverbal communication is the same in all cultures.

5.6 Choose the correct statement:

Semantic barriers are created by the use of

- (a) jargon.
- (b) slang.
- (c) culture-specific humour.
- (d) none of the above.
- (e) all of the above.

5.7 Choose the incorrect statement:

- (a) Maslow's theory has significance for office managers.
- (b) On Maslow's hierarchy self-actualisation is seen as the least important for survival.
- (c) Maslow thought that psychological needs are the most important.
- (d) Affiliation needs are important since humans need love and affection.

5.8 When people make general statements about other cultural groups, ignoring individual differences, it is called

- (a) antipathy.
- (b) cultural stereotyping.
- (c) interculturalism.
- (d) a social insult.

5.9 People from different cultures will find it difficult to communicate unless

- (a) they take special care to establish common ground for communication.
- (b) they cultivate caring attitudes that would remove any suggestion of superiority or inferiority.
- (c) they avoid negative generalizations about one another's culture.
- (d) all of the above.
- (e) only A and C.

5.10 Companies can ensure better intercultural communication by

- (a) putting a ban on all discussions about differences in culture.
- (b) encouraging people to minimize their contact with colleagues of a different culture in order to avoid any chance of conflict.
- (c) encouraging free and respectful discussion on how different cultures view situations and approaches to communication.
- (d) encouraging discussion of different cultural values placed on non-verbal communication, particularly the use of time, eye contact and the use of personal space.
- (e) A and B.
- (f) C and D.

**2 HOURS****85 MARKS**

**Study the following CASE STUDY carefully and answer the questions that follow.**

It is a Wednesday morning at 10:00 over the Christmas period in the staff lounge at a store, called FASHIONISTA. Two customer care consultants are having a coffee break.

- Consultant 1: The phones don't stop ringing with queries and customers looking for specific products. Surely they should know that it will be impossible to find stock at this time of the year?
- Consultant 2: Well we should expect this, as it is the busy period. This is your first time over a holiday period, you will get used to it. Just remain calm.
- Consultant 1: If it were only about the products, it wouldn't be a problem. The customers calling are constantly asking for that foreign consultant from West Africa with the strange accent. Surely we are able to provide better service as we are from this country?
- Consultant 2: Perhaps the customers have established a relationship with the consultant and trust her. Customers often ask for the consultant with whom they have spoken to before, as it allows for continuity.
- Consultant 1: That's not the issue. We have so much unemployment in this country and these foreigners take the work away from the people of this country. Also their accents are funny. Many foreigners are also involved in crime. I wouldn't trust them.
- Consultant 2: I don't think that is a fair assumption, as many foreigners provide skills to this country which are in demand. Many of the foreigners are here because of the political situation in their country. They are also extremely hard working.
- Consultant 1: Well, the government should provide them with food and clothing, they shouldn't be taking our jobs.
- Consultant 2: We can learn a lot about professionalism from our foreign colleagues.

**QUESTION 1 (10 MARKS)**

**FASHIONISTA** will be having their monthly management meeting to discuss the following new business agenda items: problems in customer care, professionalism and punctuality. Draw up the notice and agenda for this meeting.

Format and Language:	3
Notice (6 X ½)	3
Agenda (8 X ½)	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>(10)</b>

**QUESTION 2 (12 MARKS)**

**FASHIONISTA** has a monthly management meeting to discuss any problems. The only three items placed on the agenda for this month's meeting are: problems experienced in the customer care department, professionalism and punctuality. **Write the minutes for these three items only.** Include the heading for the minutes of the meeting.

Format and Language:	3
Name of Company	1
Heading (4 X ½ )	2
Minutes (3 X 2)	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>(12)</b>

**QUESTION 3 (10 MARKS)**

**Complete the following sentences. Only write the answer next to the number.**

- 3.1 A/an \_\_\_\_\_ is a list of items or business to be discussed at a meeting. 2
- 3.2 A record of the proceedings and the decisions taken at a meeting and written in an unbiased way is called \_\_\_\_\_. 2
- 3.3 A / an \_\_\_\_\_ is an alteration to a document at a meeting. 2
- 3.4 A \_\_\_\_\_ is a system of rules controlling all activities of an organization. 2
- 3.5 A \_\_\_\_\_ is a decision taken at a meeting, often agreed by means of a vote. 2

**QUESTION 4 (20 MARKS)**

**Read the following job advertisement carefully and answer the question that follows.**

*CUSTOMER CARE MANAGER*

*Do you have what it takes to manage  
the new and exciting FASHIONISTA  
customer care department at the  
Waterfront in Cape Town?*

Requirements:

- A minimum of two years management experience
- Good communication skills
- Be fluent in English, Chinese or German
- A National Diploma in Office Management and Technology is an advantage
- Ability to work under pressure

TASK

Write the covering letter for the application and address it to the Human Resources Manager.

Language Usage:	5
Content and structure:	15
<b>Total:</b>	<b>(20)</b>

**QUESTION 5** (10 MARKS)

The company **FASHIONISTA** is concerned about client satisfaction. As the marketing consultant you have to assist them in drawing up a questionnaire.

- 5.1 Why is it recommended that questionnaires be answered anonymously. (1X 3=3)
- 5.2 Name one advantage of a closed-choice questionnaire. (1X2=2)
- 5.3 Discuss the disadvantage of an open-ended question. (1X2=2)
- 5.4 Give an example of an open-ended question for the company **FASHIONISTA**. (1X3=3)

**QUESTION 6** (13 MARKS)

- 6.1 Explain what information should be included under the heading “**Terms of reference**” in a report. (3X1=3)
- 6.2 Name the **four methods of procedures** used to gather information for the report. (4X1=4)
- 6.3 Explain what is meant by an **appendix** to a report. (1X2=2)
- 6.4 Name the information which should be included when **signing off** in a report. (4X1=4)

**QUESTION 7** (10 MARKS)

One of your colleagues at **FASHIONISTA** has just graduated with a MTech degree in Office Management and Technology. You have to make a speech congratulating her on this wonderful achievement. Write the speech you will be making.

<b>Language Usage:</b>	2
<b>Content and structure:</b>	8
<b>Total:</b>	<b>(10)</b>

**QUESTION 1: INTENSIVE READING EXERCISE****[29]****Read the article below, then answer the questions that follow.****SOMALIS IN SA: OUT OF THE FRYING PAN INTO THE FIRE**

1. `We ran away from our country because of the war but what I have found here is no better' says Abdi Ibrahim. Abdi and his brother fled one of the bloodiest conflicts on the continent when the last working government in Somalia was replaced by a succession of violent warlords, militia and Islamist radicals who delivered chaos to the East African nation.
2. The two brothers decided to leave and headed for South Africa, in search of prosperity and, more importantly, peace. But what they encountered were locals who were intolerant towards outsiders and a country where the annual murder rate, at more than 18 000 deaths a year, is more indicative of a nation at war. Somali community leaders in South Africa claim that at least 470 of their countrymen have been murdered since 1997.
3. Violence against African immigrants is not new to South Africa, but Somalis say they have become soft targets for aggressors. Last year Cape Town was the scene of bitter tension with dozens of Somalis reportedly killed in a spate of attacks. Lately the violence has exploded in Port Elizabeth's Motherwell township where locals went on the rampage, looting and burning Somali-owned stores. The unrest erupted when three armed robbers stormed a spaza shop, demanding money from its Somali owners. Shots were fired, believed to be by the Somalis, and a local teenager was shot in the leg. The police reaction was swift, but only in securing the safety of the Somalis who were whisked from the township, about 400 in all. Their shops, unprotected, were stripped bare like meat from a bone.
4. The community policing chairman refuses to believe that rampant xenophobia was behind the destruction. The reason he explains, is business; the Somalis, who mostly sell groceries, undercut rivals with their competitive prices, making enemies in the process. It's a theme that has determined virtually all attacks against Somalis including those in Cape Town.
5. `We came looking for peace but we never found it,' they say. `We are stranded here. Everything we had has been taken. We can't go back because the situation is still so bad.'

*[Adapted from the Sunday Times, 25 Feb 2007]*

**Read each of the following questions carefully before you answer.**

- 1.1 Explain what you understand by the underlined part of the sentence in paragraph 2. (2)
- 1.2 Why do so many Somalis choose to live in South Africa? (2)
- 1.3 Consider the following quotation from the text:  
'Somalis have become soft targets for aggressors'. (Par 3)
- 1.3.1 What do you understand by the expression 'soft target'? (2)
- 1.3.2 Why do you think Somalis have become soft targets? (2)
- 1.3.3 Who are the 'aggressors'? (1)
- 1.3.4 Quote a sentence from the text that suggests that Somalis are unsafe in South Africa. (1)
- 1.4.1 Refer to par. 3. Why do you think that the police 'whisked' the Somalis away instead of arresting the robbers? (2)
- 1.4.2 Give your opinion as to whether you think that this action by the police was appropriate? (2)
- 1.5 Using your own words, explain why the Somalis are constantly under attack.  
[No marks will be given for rewriting the text.] (2)
- 1.6 Refer to par. 5. 'We can't go back ...'. Where can't they go back to? (1)
- 1.7 Explain what you understand by the underlined part of the sentence in par 1. (2)
- 1.8 Using quotation marks, quote a phrase or sentence from the text that explains:
- 1.8.1 The title of the article. (1)
- 1.8.2 The term 'xenophobia'. (1)
- 1.8.3 Ongoing incidents of violence. (1)
- 1.9 The tone of the article suggests that Somalis and the locals are in opposition to one another. Write down any three words from the text that indicate the intense dislike between the two groups. The words should be separate and not from the same sentence. (3)

**[CONTENT: 25 LANGUAGE USAGE: 4]**

**QUESTION 2: YOUR VIEW**

**[12]**

South Africans have differing opinions on refugees from Africa (Somalis, Congolese, Senegalese, Nigerians, Zimbabweans, etc.) who choose South Africa (or Cape Town) as a temporary place to settle. What is your view on refugees who settle here?

Write a paragraph (10 – 15 lines) in which you express your opinion on African refugees in South Africa. You need to decide whether you support the migration of refugees to South Africa or whether you are against it. Give valid reasons to motivate your argument.

[The Heinemann English Dictionary (1988) defines 'refugee' as follows:

refugee (n): a person who has fled from his home or country because of some danger, such as flood or war etc. ]

Mark Allocation:            Content: 6            Logical organisation of content: 3            Language usage: 3

**QUESTION 3: BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE**

[12]

You work for an international shipping company, as administrator in the Claims Department. Your company is multicultural both in South Africa as well as abroad. Your manager considers it necessary to arrange a discussion session on multiculturalism and asks you to send a memo to all staff to attend on Tuesday, 10 April, from 09:00 – 11:00.

A guest speaker, Jon Banda, has been invited.

Use the attached memo page to complete this question. You should give insight as to why the discussion session is being held. Add all the other required details. Marks will be allocated for originality.

**QUESTION 4: MEETING CORRESPONDENCE**

[17]

Your company has a Social Responsibility Outreach Programme, which aims at assisting various disadvantaged groups. A special meeting has been called to discuss the possibility of assisting refugees in South Africa.

Read the discussion below then answer the questions that follow.

Zinzi:                    Well, that's the background information to the plight [difficult situation] of refugees  
(Chairman)            in South Africa. Now that I have given you insight into the problem could we please  
                                 discuss this further and reach a decision about whether our company will offer  
                                 assistance to refugees?

Sipho:                    But Zinzi, how can we possibly be thinking of outsiders when there are so many  
                                 South Africans who are needy?

Zinzi:                    The company policy clearly states that aid is not limited to South African citizens  
                                 only. So, on the grounds of policy, refugees need not be excluded.

Jon:                        Based on what Zinzi has shared with us, from a humanitarian point of view, should we  
                                 not be reaching out to others as well?

[Discussion continues.]

Zinzi: I think that we should put this to a vote. All those in favour? That's 7.

All those against? 3

No abstentions.

Clearly the decision to assist is a majority decision. Now we need to determine the nature of the assistance. Carol, would you please call 'Refugee Assist', the national organisation, about what would be the best form of assistance from our side? First call them, then follow up with a letter so that we have everything on file. The maximum amount for a cause such as this is R20 000. Should we go along with this? Since the majority are in favour of the maximum amount being donated we'll go along with that. When we receive a reply from 'Refugee Assist' we'll have clarity on how the donation should be spent.

Thanks, everyone, for your input. Gugu, inform Pete and Jane of the decision taken here today. They are expected back in office by next Tuesday.

This meeting is officially closed. It's now 10:15.

QUESTIONS:

- 4.1 Write the agenda for this meeting. (3)
- 4.2 Compile the minutes for this part of the meeting only. (14)
- Include an Action Column. (14)

**(CONTENT: 13      LANGUAGE USAGE: 4)**

**[TOTAL MARK: 70]**

# Memorandum

To: .....

From: .....

Date: .....

Subject: .....

---



**EXTRACTING THE GOLD FROM RAW FEEDBACK****Skilled managers take it on the chin, look beyond emotions and act constructively**

1. MANAGERS need feedback, even if it's biased, rude, off the mark or irrelevant – and much of it is.

2. The trick is learning to extract and decode the meaningful stuff and turn it into something usable. Through our work with hundreds of executives, we have uncovered a number of “alchemists”: rare individuals who are adept at transforming the base minerals of low-quality feedback into gold.

3. Their behaviour follows a few patterns that other managers can learn from. Whether it's personally offensive, unclear, incomplete, pointless, or exaggerated – and whether it comes from superiors or subordinates – low-quality feedback can be toxic if it's taken to heart. It can be powerfully demotivating, damaging to managers' confidence and paralyzing.

4. It can prompt managers to waste time on the wrong issues by, for example, addressing weaknesses that are unimportant in their current roles.

Feedback almost seems to hypnotise some people. They become obsessed with it. Other managers deal with low-quality feedback by ignoring it or becoming defensive.

5. Ignoring it can lead them to dismiss all negative opinions about themselves; ultimately, they become cut off from what people around them really think and feel. Defensiveness can be even more dangerous because it angers and alienates those who would give feedback and reinforces their negative views.

6. Alchemists are able to avoid those traps and learn from even the most harmful or apparently useless comments. Their method has an emotional component that enables them to be aware of and manage their instinctive reactions and a cognitive component that allows them to extract the useful information intelligently.

They neither become obsessed with the feedback nor ignore it.

7. The result is that they distinguish the message from the medium and focus on the information they need for the problems they face. They are able to look beyond the literal meaning and find valuable second- and third-order data about people's perceptions, assumptions and attitudes. They are able to focus on their strengths and place negative messages in the context of the positive feedback they have received in the past.

8. One such alchemist – we'll call him Tom – is the customer service director of a large US-based electronics firm.

A subordinate repeatedly complained to staff about Tom's apparent blindness to another staff member's poor performance. He eventually told Tom that “some people” considered his inaction to be a sign that he didn't “have the guts to confront tough situations”.

9. The feedback, Tom said, “was an insult to my leadership”. Tom, in fact, was working behind the scenes to coach the underperformer, who required special handling because of his connections to the board. “Despite all that,” Tom notes, “the feedback really helped me.” He said it taught him to examine more carefully the potentially negative effects of actions he didn't take.

10. Although he was upset by the accusations, Tom mastered his feelings and didn't react defensively. The feedback contained important information about other people's perceptions of his actions. He extracted the usable message and was able to change his behaviour. *Fernando Bartolome and John Weeks @ NYT Syndicate*

**Adapted from the Sunday Times 6 May 2007**

**QUESTION 1: ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION** (20 MARKS)

Read the text on the previous page, and then answer the questions that follow.

Read each of the following questions carefully before you answer it:

- 1.1 Give two reasons why managers need feedback. (2)
- 1.2 State in your own words why Tom felt that the feedback was an insult to his leadership. (1)
- 1.3 Give a reason for managers not to ignore negative feedback. (1)
- 1.4 In addition to ignoring negative feedback, give another way in which managers deal with negative feedback. (1)
- 1.5 How would you label Tom's management style? Motivate your answer with an example from the article. (2)
- 1.6 Give two reasons why you believe this management style is appropriate. (2)
- 1.7 Identify the **types** of formal or informal organisational communication referred to in each of the following statements:
- 1.7.1 A subordinate repeatedly complained about Tom's apparent blindness to another subordinate.
- 1.7.2 A subordinate eventually told Tom that some people thought he could not cope with tough situations.
- 1.7.3 Tom discussed the negative feedback with the financial director of his firm.
- 1.7.4 Tom sent an email to the secretary of the financial director asking for the financial report to be sent to him. (4)
- 1.8 Give two reasons why you would consider Tom to be an 'alchemist'? (2)
- 1.9 Define the grapevine. (2)
- 1.10 Give an example of the use of the grapevine in the case study. Does the grapevine have a negative or positive impact on the situation depicted in this case study? Motivate your answer. (3)

**QUESTION 2: SMALL GROUP COMMUNICATION** (20 MARKS)

- 2.1 Refer to paragraph 8 of the case study above. Tom's subordinate reveals to him that 'some people' considered his inaction to be a sign that he didn't have the guts to confront tough situations. According to the Johari Window theory of communication, describe the four (4) quadrants that constitute Tom's Johari window in light of this revelation by his subordinate. State **what each quadrant represents** and how it **changes** as Tom's situation changes by this disclosure. (8)

- 2.2 Tom, as customer service director divides his staff into groups of five to in order to utilize the expertise of the different members to work on special projects. Discuss the five (5) stages of group formation and development which the groups will encounter as they work on the projects. **Note:** No marks will be allocated for just naming each stage of group formation. You should write at least **2** full sentences on each stage. (10)
- 2.3 With reference to question 2.2, name the type of groups which Tom put together to work on special projects. Mention a characteristic of the leaders of these groups. (2)

**QUESTION 3: PROFESSIONAL SELF-DEVELOPMENT (20 MARKS)**

**Read the case study below and then answer the questions:**

- 3.1 Thambo was hired as a technician by a medical laboratory, Sanpod. This organisation ran diagnostic tests for private doctors, hospitals and clinics. Hoping to become a supervisor in the not too distant future, Thambo worked extremely hard. Within a month, he was called in by the informal group leader, Ralph and told to stop boasting. “You’re doing more work than two of us combined. If you want to be one of the boys, get rid of that productivity bug.” Thambo gradually reduced his productivity to about one-third of what he had been doing, telling himself that if he maintained the work tempo he had originally set for himself, he might make diagnostic errors.
- 3.1.1 Define motivation. (2)
- 3.1.2 Identify the needs which initially motivated Thambo towards hard work. Give a reason for each answer. (4)
- 3.1.3 Identify and comment on the need which eventually motivated Thambo to put less effort into his work. (3)
- 3.2 Before Thambo reduced his productivity at work, his goal was to become the supervisor of the medical laboratory, Sanpod. The present supervisor of the medical laboratory is retiring at the end of next year. For Thambo to be successful he needs to set **SMART** goals. State what each letter in the acronym SMART stands for. (3)
- 3.3 With reference to the case-study above, it appears as if Ralph is putting pressure on Thambo because he feels threatened and has a poor self-image. What advise would you give Ralph that would assist him with his professional self-development? (8)

**TOTAL : (60 MARKS)**

**QUESTION 1**  
**CASE-STUDY****JOB CORRESPONDENCE****(35 MARKS)**

Talk show host, Felicity Huff, has been criticized by members of the Rastafarian community as being “prejudiced” and “insensitive”.

She has neither the ability nor the professionalism to handle sensitive issues on television. This was the reaction of Rastafarian leaders, in whose opinion she did not even have the ability to choose specialists when it came to discussing delicate matters.

Mr Molo said that many complaints about Miss Huff had been received regarding a recent show. “The Rastafarians she used on her panel to discuss the Rastafarian way of life, specifically their beliefs on the use of Marijuana and the wearing of dreadlocks, did not represent the greater Rastafarian community; nor were they experts who could speak with some authority on the subject,” he said.

Mr Molo claimed that Miss Huff had failed to control the show; she had not managed to get her audience and participants to conduct themselves in a dignified manner and she appeared to approve of some of the derogatory statements made by members of the audience. “It was a free for all. Some members of the audience said that Rastafarians although generally recognized as peace loving, were out of touch with reality and were drug addicts. Miss Huff had spoken of the untidy appearance of those wearing long dreadlocks. If she is serious about getting people to talk seriously, she herself must be well-versed on the subjects she deals with; she must be able to make informative statements,” said Mr Molo.

Members of the community alleged that Miss Huff’s show was shallow, narrow-minded and promoted misunderstandings, rather than providing solutions.

According to Mr Sam Wilson of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission, the Commission had received several complaints, including a petition of 25 signatures. The matter was to be taken under consideration.

Adapted from *The Argus*

**1.1 Answer the following questions on the case study:**

- 1.1.1 In addition to radio and television interviews, list three types of employment interviews which may be used in the workplace. (3)
- 1.1.2 1.1.2.1 Define “prejudiced”. (1)
- 1.1.2.2 Describe two reasons why you believe Miss Huff was accused of being prejudiced by referring to the case study. (2)

- 1.1.3 Discuss three errors which Miss Huff made as the interviewer of the show
- 1.1.3.1 before the interview; and (3)
- 1.1.3.2 during the interview in order to ensure that communication was successful. (3)
- 1.1.4 What steps did the Rastafarian community take after the interview to convey their dissatisfaction? (2)
- 1.1.5 As future applicants for employment you will be attending interviews. State whether the following statements are True/False by writing the question number and **True or False** on your answer sheet:
- 1.1.5.1 Maintain eye-contact throughout the interview. (1)
- 1.1.5.2 You should wait until you are invited to be seated. (1)
- 1.1.5.3 You should attempt to avoid answering questions on salary. (1)
- 1.1.5.4 You should be prepared for challenging questions aimed at determining how you would cope in a crisis. (1)
- 1.1.5.5 Interviews are a waste of time when you do not get the job. (1)
- 1.1.5.6 Be honest and state the negative aspects of the firm you are leaving. (1)
- 1.2 A position for the post of Manager of Office Planning has been advertised in the Cape Argus of 10 November 2007. Answer the following questions:**
- 1.2.1 Describe the information that you should include in your covering letter in response to this advertisement. (5)
- 1.2.2 Identify the types of questions which you may be asked at the interview:
- 1.2.2.1 Why did you decide to apply for this position? (1)
- 1.2.2.2 In what year did you complete your studies? (1)
- 1.2.2.3 According to your CV you have been employed before. Is that correct? (1)
- 1.2.2.4 I think a woman's place is at home looking after the kids. Don't you? (1)
- 1.2.2.5 If you were asked to reorganize the department, how would you go about it? (1)
- 1.2.3 You have been invited to an interview for the position of Manager of Office Planning. Describe five steps you would take to prepare for the interview. (5)

**QUESTION 2****MULTICULTURAL COMMUNICATION****(20 MARKS)****Answer the following questions with reference to the case study given in Question 1:**

- 2.1 Define “culture”. (2)
- 2.2 State which culture was being discussed on the television programme in the case study above. (1)
- 2.3 Values, norms and symbols are listed as elements of culture. Give an example of each of these concepts by referring to examples in the case study. Your answer should be set out as follows: (3)
- 2.3.1 Values
  - 2.3.2 Norms
  - 2.3.3 Symbols
- 2.4 Define “ethnocentricity”. (2)
- 2.5 Give two examples of ethnocentricity from the case study and explain how they gave rise to unsuccessful communication. (4)
- 2.6 What clues did the Television managers of Miss Huff’s show receive to inform them that communication had been unsuccessful? (2)
- 2.7 Refer to three skills which the management should employ to ensure that all staff, including television presenters, would be successful at multicultural communication. Motivate your answer by referring to the case study. (6)

**QUESTION 3****REPORTS****(20 MARKS)**

You are employed as the Administration Manager of NuWorld. A seminar on the healthy office environment was held on Monday 5, November 2007 at Sanlam Training Centre and you attended. Various innovations of office furniture, such as office and computer chairs, were demonstrated at the seminar. Presentations were given by Mr Yuri Hopkins from the World Health Institute and by office exercise expert, Ms Simone Sati. Technological innovations were demonstrated and included computer programmes as well as hi-tech music systems and headsets for lunch time relaxation for staff.

**REQUIRED:**

Refer to the seminar brochure below and write a feedback report in **memo format** on the seminar. The report would be addressed to the staff of NuWorld. Provide a general evaluation of the seminar and make recommendations for the application of furniture or technological innovations within the company. Make use of the following headings:

Title, Purpose, Demonstrations, Presentations, Conclusions, Recommendations.

**Format: 3**  
**Content: 10**  
**Language: 7**

**SEMINAR**

**THE HEALTHY OFFICE ENVIRONMENT**

**ON**

**MONDAY 5 NOVEMBER 2007**

**AT**

**9:00**

**AT SANLAM TRAINING CENTRE**

Demonstrations:

- Scientifically and ergonomically designed computer chairs and desks
- Technological innovations: De-stress computer programmes
- Hi-tech music systems and headsets for the office canteen

Presentations:

- Mr Yuri Hopkins from the World Health Institute

Stress related illnesses

Office politics

Office communication

- Office exercise expert, Ms Simone Sati

Lunch time Yoga

Exercises at your desk

Walk your way to health

Bookings close on 15 October. R300.00 per person

Lunch and tea will be served.

Contact: Mrs Wilson Office Ergonomics Tel: 021-4355667 Fax: 021- 1234567

Email: [officeergonomics@telkomsa.com](mailto:officeergonomics@telkomsa.com)