After years of incidental teaching of tertiary students in writing skills (through feedback instruction) the main author of this publication developed a formal course in academic writing for Bed (Hons) students at the University of Johannesburg. The first edition of this book formed an integral part of this course and was published in 2001. In the South African context, students in this course (and in most other courses) have to write in English, which is (to many students) their second language. This publication therefore fills a gap, enabling students to effectively express themselves and thus enhance the quality of their written work.

This second edition, however, goes further than mere language instruction for academic writing. In the words of the authors in the preface:

*We still believe that in looking for the right word, the right thought crystallises. We still believe that revision is inherent to good writing and that the gateway to writing is through reading. What we are adding is knowledge in performance and that this performance is rehearsed and never ends in a completely final product. The final product of inquiry – the revised and edited text – is one milestone in the author’s journey of investigation of and writing about the social landscape.*

This extract highlights two of the main focus points of this publication: an analysis of the process of academic writing, and the process (and product) of inquiry. The fact that the action of writing is not a representation of an author’s thinking, but of the process of thinking is stressed.

A student wishing to enhance his or her writing skills may selectively read the book, choosing any chapter that might be of specific interest, without necessarily reading the previous chapters.

Chapter 1 offers an overview of the structure of a research text, and points out three phases of writing: pre-drafting, initial drafting and the editing phase. Most master’s and doctoral students will find this chapter very useful, because it clearly defines the steps towards writing a suitable research proposal. Study supervisors will find this chapter, as well as most of the book, a useful tool in guiding an inexperienced student through the phases of a major research project. In this first chapter thirteen possible phrases are suggested to introduce opening statements, which may be very helpful for especially those students who do not have English as their mother tongue.

Chapter 2 points out that research is about asking questions that lead to inquiry. Carefully phrased research questions form the backbone of an effective research process. Ways in which the topic of the research is rephrased into a problem statement that is worth the intended research, are explained.

In chapter 3 the matter of data sources is tackled, and the authors clearly show the different contributions journals, books and the internet can make. Ways in which to utilise each type of source are discussed, after which the correct way of citing the sources and compiling a bibliography is explained. This chapter can be used in combination with the list of references at the back of the book that should lead a student to a large number of internet sources.
The topic of chapter 4 is “Reading your way into academic writing”. Focused reading of academic texts forms an integral part of all stages of academic research and writing, and this chapter presents different types of text to illustrate what the authors call the “geography” of each type of text, focusing on books and academic articles. What makes this publication particularly useful, is the insertion of practical tasks to be completed by students to practice certain skills.

The reader’s technique of writing definitions, memos and summaries, a skill that is central to the writing of academic texts, is developed in a number of exercises in chapter 5. Of particular interest to most students should be the section on paraphrasing, as compared to merely citing the original words of an author’s text. Moreover, the importance of an actual understanding of what is read in the writing process, is stressed.

Chapter 6 may be regarded as the one that is of primary importance in this publication. One of the most important basic skills a student should master, is to write sentences, and then to effectively link them. For students who do not have English as their first language, this chapter offers a very useful set of tools in the form of linking words and phrases. One example of these tools is the list of suggested transitional words when an author “wants to compare and contrast”: Yet, while, whereas, in contrast, on the one hand, conversely and by comparison.

In chapter 7 the focus shifts to paragraph construction by linking sentences to form a new unit. The main purpose for the author should be coherence, and the authors succeed to persuade a reader that this is not merely a technical accomplishment, but a cognitive one. The writing of sentences and paragraphs, in combination with headings, form the foundation of a persuasive writing style, according to chapter 8. Added to this is sound knowledge of the terminology of the discipline, and the authors indicate that “argument and style meet in structure”.

The most notable difference in this second edition of the publication is the addition of chapter 9, which deals with the writing of a field inquiry. With qualitative research methods rapidly gaining popularity due to its outstanding advantages in especially the humanities and social sciences, it is appropriate to include such a chapter. In the first part the planning of field research is discussed, together with suggestions on how to write about the design of the inquiry. The focus then shifts to effective reporting on the qualitative data that have been interpreted and analysed.

Chapter 10 concludes the book, stressing the importance of proper revision of the text, which entails more than editing and proofreading. The authors argue that the “polished final draft is the result of several drafts.” The ways of reorganising, clarifying, tightening up and cutting are discussed, and a set of guiding questions for the revision process is provided.

In conclusion, the main features of this publication are

- the clear language in which it is written;
- the practical, logical approach of the authors, based on sound research in the field of academic writing methodology, combined with years of experience as lecturers;
- the effective combination of information on writing as well as research management, methods and approaches;
- the effective use of short, appropriate exercises and practical examples that are offered in every chapter and in the addenda.

*Finding your way in Academic Writing*, without any doubt, will be an asset for both inexperienced and more experienced researchers, especially those who have a mother tongue other than English. Study supervisors may save themselves hours if they
prescribe this book to their postgraduate students. This is the type of publication that should not be on the shelf of researchers; it should be on the desktop.