

“Students Can Write!” How can Students Explore and Improve their Writing by Using Different Academic Genres, Sources and Voices?

Best practice article

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Abstract

One purpose of this article is to shed light upon the concept of voice in writing, related to genres and sources in humanities. Another purpose is to participate in the academic discussion on voice. We want to raise awareness about the use of voice, in general, among students and supervisors. We want to inspire and motivate students to voice their texts explicitly and naturally – by using different genres and by entering into dialogue with central sources. Such sources can be used to create new meaning and for sense making, but they do not carry a given answer (Dervin, 1999; Holliday & Rogers, 2013).

The variation and complexity of voice is present in the variety of sources students find and use, such as articles, textbooks, dissertations, interviews, films, pictures, etc. Voices are explicit or implicit in all kind of sources used. Voices emerge as authoritative and experienced within academia, for instance in textbooks and articles. Voices may be creative and inviting. Some are attractive and believable, others hesitant or uncertain, as voices in many texts written by students.

Students, at all academic levels, express insecurity when working with academic writing and genres. However, by analysing and practicing different academic genres and by attending to voice(s) in others' texts, students are empowered to explore genres and sources and to voice their own texts. By using and entering into dialogue with various sources, students make choices about how to present and interact with sources. In these ways, students develop their voices and improve their texts.

Our theoretical point of departure deals with voice, dialogue (Elbow, 2007; Bakhtin, 1986) and the use of sources combined with the search for information (Dervin, 1999; Holliday & Rogers, 2013). We analyse and compare two examples of the use of sources in academic texts, in order to show how texts representing two genres, use voices and sources in different ways. We present supervisors' guidance strategies, representing supervisors' voices. We – and supervisors – mention students' general challenges with academic writing. Finally, we present dialogic

strategies and propose a new dialogic strategy. This new strategy combines and unites reading and writing in different genres, drawing on and entering into dialogue with central sources, with different and clear ways of voicing; explicit and implicit voicing. Our dialogic strategy – and other intended dialogic strategies – can be used by students and all supervisors who assist students in writing, when dealing with voice(s) and sources.

Keywords: voice, source, genre, dialogic strategies, academic writing, guidance, supervision, information search

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Introduction

Raised awareness, knowledge and experience related to working with voice(s) and the use of voice in different academic texts and genres is probably one of most valuable and effective steps towards improving academic writing; it implies awareness about and attention to one’s own and others’ use of voice, depending on readers and genres, fields and traditions.

This leads us to mention one common and complex challenge, which is well known to many students and supervisors. This challenge gives us one obvious reason why attending to voice – in different ways – is so important and necessary: Creating and developing one’s voice as an academic writer is the main problem or challenge for students when writing academic texts with sources (Flower, Stein, Ackerman, Kantz, McCormick, & Peck, 1990).

Voice expressed, or realized by the pronoun “I” (and other pronouns) is a theme in an ongoing discussion in academia, dipped in myths and normative conceptions: “I” or not “I”. This is not a matter of either/or in humanities, but rather both/and, depending on which parts of a text we are working at, and how visible we want to, or choose to be, as authors and researchers. It is often a matter of choice and experience as well as genre, discipline and tradition (cf. Fløttum, Dahl, & Kinn, 2006; Lie, 2012; Stock, 2016).

Attending to different voice aspects in reading, writing, and supervising – in students’ texts, in academic genres, and in the use of sources – leads to raised meta-awareness and knowledge of writers’ voices in texts. It also leads to the creation of meaning and understanding, and it makes us involved when we meet and notice writers’ explicit voices (cf. Lie, 2012, p. 187).

A way of attending to voice is to challenge students to use their voice explicitly and to enter into dialogue with other voices as a strategy to raise awareness and improve their writing. A dialogue with sources can start by asking students to challenge the authority of an author voice, for instance by asking questions, by taking a stand on what a text, or information from a source, actually means, and by arguing why it concerns them in their own text. Dialogue is a useful technique for developing thoughts, creating meaning and improving writing. It is also a way of gaining leadership in a text and freeing student writers from only referring or reproducing fragments of texts. – Besides, in the long run, welcoming students to our academic community with their own explicit voices, and nourishing development of their voices, can make us learn from them as well, without or instead of moulding them into decent academic citizens.

Our theoretical framework is dialogism, and we focus on voice(s) in three contexts:

- A genre and source related context, illustrated by a textbook passage and a thesis passage
- An academic guidance and writing context, using supervisors' and students' voices
- A dialogue based context related to strategies, available and applicable in guidance and writing, for students and supervisors.

The term guidance is preferred to the term supervision in this article. The term guidance fits well to a dialogic context and strategy; it can be viewed as an invitation to equalize the power relation between students and supervisors, or at least, a joint intension of changing this relation towards equality. However, supervisors supervise.

We present a minor study on guidance. In this study, we have collected data from supervisors who answered open-ended questions by email. The answers give us the supervisors' guidance strategies, experiences and views on students' writing competence and needs. Our supervisors' strategies coincide with strategies from other studies which document what supervisors focus on in their guidance (Handal, Lauvås, & Hofgaard Lycke, 2013; Holm & Clemensen, 2017). We also present a new dialogic guidance strategy – and other strategies. In this strategy, different ways of reading are combined with (re)writing in different genres, serving as tools when working with voice(s) and sources in academic writing.

What is voice, and how to attend to voice?

Voice is a fascinating and complex concept that carries many layers of meaning, and it is used in several ways. Some meanings can be expressed by synonyms as *ethos*, *persona*, *writer position*, *identity and self* (cf. Elbow, 2007, p. 177). The many meanings and functions become apparent when we study the many different ways sources are used in academic texts (cf. Stock, 2016).

The concept of voice is close to the concept of style. Style is like a signature of a writer. Yet, style differs in academic genres in such a way that each genre has its own characteristics. However, many genres are hybrids, and the use of voice differs in different parts of a text, as we have mentioned earlier. An explicit voice – for instance as expressed by the use of personal pronouns as “I”, “my” and “we” – is more often found in introductions and conclusions than in other parts of a text.

In a broad sense, we use our voice to present ourselves in the world and to communicate and interact with others, orally and in writing. We all have our specific voice, as well as an oral voice, a voice in writing, an inner voice. Voices are always in dialogue with other voices, in this article and all other texts.

Authors' voices are always present in all utterances and texts, varying from explicit voices, exemplified above, to implicit voices as we find in a more impersonal way of presence, as in passive verb constructions (cf. Fløttum et al., 2006, p. 270). All texts house the authors' voices as well as many other voices, among others the voices of sources used. This article for instance, houses many different voices: Among others, supervisors' and students' voices, theoretical voices, other authors' and sources' voices, our author voices, and peer reviewer voices. Besides, our voices are in dialogue with these other voices and with your reader voice. In these dialogues new voices appear.

All such voices are constituent elements of dialogues of all kinds. One type of dialogue is the one we know from our everyday usage of the term as an oral conversation between two or more persons. Another type is the inner dialogue, the intrapersonal dialogue, which we all have. In a broader sense, there are dialogues in all written texts and dialogues between readers and writers. In an even broader and philosophical sense, dialogue is the foundation for the human understanding (Bakhtin, 1984, in Dysthe, Bernhardt, & Esbjørn, 2012, p. 57).

As mentioned earlier, we focus mainly on two aspects of voice. Voice is expressed by the way we are present and present ourselves in our texts, as writers, by the use of pronouns. Voice is also expressed by the way we present and use our sources as well as by and in sources. Sources represent other voices which we have invited into our texts. We choose to focus on pronouns as a voice aspect because they are simple to engage with, in texts. Our choice of sources as a voice aspect is based on the fact that they are inevitable in research and academic writing; the use of sources, references and reference lists is one of the constituting characteristics of academic texts. Initially, we could ask: Who are we in our texts? Where and how do we present ourselves – and others – explicitly and implicitly? What do we do in our texts, with words, speech acts and language? However, our textual voice does not tell anything about our character as an author (cf. Elbow, 2007, p. 173). Later we could ask: Which voices and sources do we invite into our texts? And why? Among the voices we have invited into this article are the voices of the supervisors in our study, and they bring their students’ voices along.

Voices – in a Bakhtinian sense – are constituent elements of dialogues of all kinds. Some dialogues are multi-voiced or polyphonic, others appear as single-voiced or monologic. As we have mentioned, written texts are dialogic, but some texts appear monologic. This is often the case with textbooks because they tend to “suppress” other voices that always are present in all texts, for instance by not mentioning explicit references in the text itself. References are expressions of other voices, but in some textbooks these other voices are implicit, or “hidden” or even invisible to non-expert readers, as for instance new students. The absence or implicit use of references in texts gives an impression of “single-voiceness”, and makes texts appear authoritative and autonomous. Besides, if references and sources are not mentioned, it is difficult to see a text as a link in a chain of texts or communication, which is a central thought in Bakhtin’s work (cf. Dysthe, 1997, p. 65). If sources are implicit, or there are no explicit references or just a few, it is important that we – and our students – ask questions and use these as a tool to get hold of and “reconstruct” sources – and find traces of other voices. Why? Because this work and these voices help us to see texts as dialogues. Besides, understanding, creating meaning and sense-making are dialogical processes.

In an important article on voice, Peter Elbow presents a historical overview of the understanding of voice from Aristotle to our modern internet era, and Elbow shows how we can benefit from and shift between reading through two different lenses: We can choose to read in two ways: either through the lens of text, the words as abstracts or sign systems, or through the lens of voice, where intonation, context and rhetoric come into play (Elbow, 2007).

Both lenses are relevant to apply when learning and supervising academic writing, and when reading and interpreting. To avoid the strong authoritative voice, that of the expert, we propose that students are encouraged to read a text as it is, i.e. through the text lens, regardless of the authors expertise and voice, and critically go through the argumentation and the reasoning, asking questions. To understand a text, we can read it out loud and hear some of the

meaning, and then reread it and hear more, since each reading is an interpretation: “the same words differ, depending on who says them and how” (2007, p. 175). To get hold of voice aspects – for instance the use of pronouns and the use of sources – we encourage students and supervisors to read through the voice lens.

Also Paul Ricoeur proposes that we read a text twice: At first we read it on its own premises where we look at its structure (Dennis Donoghue in Elbow, 2007, p. 184), and then we focus on content and interpretation, the text as communication. – In our first reading, we would notice the structure as well as pay attention to dominant formal characteristics and the presence or absence of sources and references.

From sources to information as sense-making

Research builds on a variety of relevant and reliable sources. These are dependent on the readers and users who apply them for a specific purpose; for instance to create (new) meaning in their work, as part of a dialogic process. The information in sources must be evaluated as relevant and related to the actual research questions. As students and researchers, we also turn to information searching to find possible sources on earlier research in order to frame our work and to make sense of our research (purposes) to our readers. For readers it should be possible to track the sources in texts.

Information in social science and in the humanities must be seen as human information, as emphasized by Brenda Dervin in her work on sense-making theory (Dervin, 1999). Information is fluid, not a physical piece or entity that one can hold: It can and needs to be interpreted by its user(s), and it carries a potential of multiple and possible readings or interpretations (1999, pp. 730–731). In that sense, experts, students and “ordinary human beings” are all theory makers. We create theories and see if they make sense. If they do not, we unmake them. Such “sense-making” and “sense-unmaking” is a result of an inner dialogue, guiding us to interpret information.

As we are capable of comprehending time and space and move between them to grasp meaning, or question information, interpreting information is an action, and a dialogue with voices of information and sources. According to Dervin’s perspective on dialogue in information seeking, one of our tasks as supervisors is to ask the student seeker: What are your needs? And after the search: Does your search for information contribute to bridge your lack of information from the question you ask(ed)?

We can – or should, perhaps – ask our students if and how they bridge gaps with the findings of their searches. By asking, we make the search process visible. By answering, students can develop a search strategy, for instance by choosing key words and reflecting upon which words and which information are helpful, or useful, and at the same time, accepting that sources of information might be hard to get, fuzzy, or of no use at all.

When students use key words as search words, information searching might make more sense. However, sources of information per se do not carry “the answer”, but must be taken into account by the student as a researcher (Dervin, 1999, p. 745).

In their work on college students and their search skills, Wendy Holliday and Jim Rogers observe that when librarians and composition teachers present search for information as a research or study skill to students, we tend to communicate the sources as objects one is to

find (Holliday & Rogers, 2013, p. 261). The sources seem to be introduced, or understood, as entities that contain exactly the information students need. What students understand – when being taught the importance of using sources in writing – is that they must find “the correct sources”, or a sufficient and representative selection of sources (2013, pp. 261– 265).

In this dialogue, we can go even a step further by asking our students this question: Which sources do you think will be useful? Doing so, we place the responsibility on the search where it belongs: at the student seeker. Consequently, the student writer is in charge of all searches, sources and voices.

The use of voices and sources in two genres: a textbook and a MA thesis

In academia we find a great variety of texts and genres, with different characteristics in different fields and traditions. The most known and prominent genres may be textbooks, articles, theses and reports. These are the most common texts and genres students meet.

The genres we will focus on in the following are the textbook and the thesis. They are illustrated by one passage from a textbook and one from a MA thesis, both from history of religions. We have chosen to focus on a thesis, rather than an article, as these two represent genres with common and similar characteristics; they both have a clear and often standardized structure, they use sources for different purposes, contain solid argumentation, create and add new knowledge to a scientific field and tradition.

The textbook genre presents established knowledge in a subject or field, and the thesis is an apprentice scholarly work, which presents new knowledge on a specific field (www.sokogskriv/en/). Besides, these two use voice in each their way; the textbook illustrates the use of an authoritative, experienced expert voice, and the thesis the cautious student voice.

How can students who read textbooks, and journal articles, themselves juggle between different genres and produce a thesis or another academic text? Our obvious answer is that they need to practice writing and reading a lot and develop their academic skills, knowledge and sense within their disciplines, by exploring and learning which sources – and voices – are appropriate when and why.

In the two examples below, we see how sources are handled differently and how that affects the voice aspect:

Example 1: Passage from a textbook chapter

It has been disputed whether Odin might be an old god in the Nordic countries. Earlier, many were of the opinion that he later became the omnipotent god he appears to be in the Eddas, a god of little importance where the functions he gradually was given, which puts him in the forefront of the hierarchy of the gods, consequently are of a newer date (Schjødt, 2011, p. 177).

We notice that the author above states that “(i)t has been disputed” without specifying who has “disputed” this. Probably he refers to the academic community working with the Eddas. He also states that “many had the understanding”, but who are these “many”? Perhaps they are historians of religions? However, that is not the author’s concern in this text. His voice is the authoritative, expert voice who informs the reader about Odin.

Example 2: Passage from a MA thesis

In *Gylvagingning* Snorre writes about the mythology from the beginning of the world till its end Ragnarok (the Last Days). The source he seems to have concentrated most on is the Edda poem *Voluspá* (Vsp) (according to Mundal 1992:180). *Skaldskaparmál* are records of paraphrases and euphemisms (kenninger) which the Norse skalds used in their work (...) *Háttatal* is a poem on the apprenticeship of skaldskap (Norse poetry) containing 102 strophes that Snorre composed to honour Håkon Håkonsson and the Earl Skule Bårdsson (according to Magerøy, 1967:7–9). (Andersen, 2006, p. 24).

The author of the MA thesis above informs the reader about a work of Snorre and his main source. The author turns to explicit expert voices and sources to back her statements on how Snorre used *Voluspá* as point of departure. By mentioning that the main source is *Voluspá*, the author indicates that there may be others, but the explicit use of Mundal as the expert voice backs her argument. To explain what *Háttatal* is and what functions it had, she refers to a historian, even though this information can be seen as a plain fact.

In the two examples, we see two different uses of voice and sources. The sources of the MA thesis are explicit and easy to track, whereas the sources of textbook remain hidden. The textbook author mentions that Odin probably earned his power at a newer date, but he does not go into details here, nor does he give the reader the specific sources. This does not mean that the textbook is less reliable. The expert voice does not need backing, in this case. His task is to tell the reader about Odin and his role, not to set the scene about which sources he builds on. The student's voice is cautious; to hedge her statements she turns to the experts in the field for backing. Both author voices are similar by being impersonal. But the obvious choice for the textbook author is the expert voice and the absence of explicit sources, and the natural choice in the MA thesis is a cautious student voice and the use of explicit sources and voices.

Supervisors' guidance strategies and students' needs

Before dealing with answers from supervisors in our study, we want to mention two recent studies: a Norwegian study on guidance and feedback in a university context, and a Danish study on students' challenges and needs. We have chosen these because the first represent supervisors' explicit strategies and voices, and the second focuses on students' reported views, needs in a writing context, and shows their voices.

The Norwegian study aims to find out which approaches dominate Scandinavian supervisors' strategies (Handal, Lauvås, & Hofgaard Lycke, 2013). The authors present supervisors' strategies based on a selection of reports from 79 supervisors. When attending a course on guidance, the supervisors were asked to write a short report on how they would give feedback on a draft from a PhD candidate in an imagined guidance meeting. The following general categories were identified in the authors' analyses of the reports:

- Evaluative comments
- Advice
- Process and product guidance
- Invitation to the student to participate in the dialogue
- Metacommunication (on the meeting, the relation and the supervising strategy)

The Danish study presents perceptions, feelings and thoughts expressed by 12 Danish MA students on academic writing (Holm & Clemensen, 2017). The study also shows how these

students position themselves to develop a writer’s identity within academia – or voice, as we call it. The students have different social and age background, but nevertheless, they face the same challenges. They strive to crack the academic codes and writing conventions. They experience the typical academic voice as “unnatural” and often as alienating. They feel insecure when it comes to understanding the academic texts they read (Holm & Clemensen, 2017, pp. 44–46).

The results from this study coincide with both the experiences reported by the supervisors in our study and with our own experiences from our writing centres. Students who visit the writing centres, express insecurity, both in individual meetings and when participating in workshops. The expectations and requirements they meet from faculty, are blurred to them. Common student questions deal with sources and academic standards: Which sources should I turn to? What is a good argument? Is this method or theory? Is this a proper research question? Other common challenges are the use of theory and the creation of (new) meaning. However, the main problem is the one we mentioned in our introduction: How to balance the dependency on sources and theories with independent thinking in writing.

Answers from our supervisors and discussion

In a minor study conducted in 2018, we asked a group of supervisors about their experiences on supervising students in their writing process at BA and MA level. We asked 14 and received answers from seven. We sent the supervisors open-ended questions by email, addressing guidance, the supervisor’s actual strategies and views on students’ challenges and needs. Our supervisors are all experienced supervisors and experts in their fields. They represent supervisors in humanities and come from two institutions in higher education in Bergen, Norway. We have given them fictional names to ensure anonymity: Alexander, Berit, Cesilia, Dagny, Elisabeth, Fredrik and Gjertrud.

The answers from our supervisors show some common aspects with regard to what they focus on. We have identified four such aspects, representing their supervising strategies. These strategies are explicit and elaborative examples of common strategies and similar to the findings in the study of Handal et al. (2013):

- The supervisors use earlier assignments and other texts as good text examples to be followed
- They emphasize the importance of a huge amount of reading
- They discuss criteria of qualities in academic texts with their students
- They work explicitly on language aspects – i.e. voice aspects, in our terminology

These aspects might represent some main dialogic strategies and can be understood as important characteristics of academic ways of thinking and working. Besides, they reflect academic norms, standards and traditions. Our supervisors also point to the necessity of learning and knowing the main ingredients of academic writing and texts: How do students – and other academic writers – find and combine the proper ingredients as part of the process that results in (good) academic texts? Writing an academic text is like baking a good, organic sourdough rye bread. You can only do this when you have the proper ingredients, an oven, the time and the knowhow of the sourdough bread baking techniques. You know all elements of the whole process: making the dough, mixing the ingredients, kneading the mixture, letting it rise, for as

long as needed, at a proper place, etc. You bake the bread in the oven, preferably at a rather low temperature. You take it out, let it cool down, let it rest, cut it in proper slices. Finally, you eat it slowly, enjoying it, paying attention to the texture, the taste, and the smell, perhaps serving it to your soulmate and telling the story of your sourdough bread.

One of the *questions* we asked our supervisors was: “Based on your experiences as supervisor, how will you describe the writing competence on students’ texts at BA and MA level?”

The supervisors had different experiences; some students master academic writing and the writing process, others obviously struggle. Part of the struggling appears in how students’ write: Some mix different voice characteristics or style levels, everyday expressions and idioms with academic words and language. Some compose complicated sentences in a complicated language.

Alexander says that many students *lack confidence* in their own language and try to write “academically”, and this causes unnecessary problems and complicated language. Alexander’s strategy is to

try to show them that by using their regular language they can write well, and show them examples on academic texts that are clear and easy ... The main point is that the students feel comfortable in their own language instead of trying to write what many believe to be an “academic” language, i.e. complicated with difficult words.

Complicated language is also mentioned as a “misunderstanding” by Dagny who says that a good thesis is characterized by a clear and easy language: ”Many [students] believe that they must write complicated to fulfil the requirements. In my opinion that is nonsense.”

Fredrik too points to language: “A good thesis is well structured, reasons well and is therefore “not unnecessary difficult” to read.”

Another *question* in our study was: “What makes the students write good theses, and what characterizes good assignments?”

Berit answers that to be able to write well, you must read a lot. All kinds of texts, but obviously one should read a lot, both research articles and theoretical texts to get some examples of how scientific literature can look like.

Fredrik states, that to him, there are several important aspects that are crucial in good assignments:

- That the student is motivated to learn to write well (inner motivation)
- Practice, practice, practice
- A lot of intensive reading of academic literature to learn the academic code
- A work plan and time schedule to plan the work ahead.

A suggestion from *Fredrik* is to create a writing group: Find someone to join you in the writing process. That will make it easier to stick to your work plan, and you will have someone to discuss your text with, someone who can read and comment your drafts.

Fredrik and *Berit* pay attention to reading and thorough reading. *Cesilia* tells us that she gives the students examples on good texts. This gives the students insight to what “we are looking for”, what a good assignment is. *Gjertrud* points out that her strategy to get the students to improve their writing is to get them to write early in the process, they are “happy to postpone writing”. She too emphasises that students should write a lot. She urges her students to read

actively and critically, not only with regard to the subject itself, but also with regard to the academic writing conventions – i.e. voice aspects, in our terminology.

Elisabeth mentions collaboration between academic staff and libraries as a key element to ensure that students meet with good examples from the subject:

My experience is that students, who seek knowledge and experiences on writing through participating in writing seminars in their studies, or in workshops on writing organized by the libraries, enhance their writing when it comes to structure and sharpening their assignments. They make informed decisions on theory regarding their research statement and balance their presentation when it comes to using relevant theories.

Alexander would like his students’ to regain confidence in their language. He writes:

It is by far easier to write within a clear language than within a complicated one, so an important issue as a supervisor is to try to show this. It is not always easy, but it is always wonderful to be part of, and experience that a student regains confidence in her language.

Dagny mentions a thought-provoking strategy; that is to improve students’ drafts by rewriting the text herself: “I rewrite parts of the text. I explain why in supervision ... I also tell them that I will not read their text if they don’t ‘correct’ (it).

We read Dagny’s strategy through an emphatic voice lens; she intends to meet students’ needs, as other supervisors, but students are the owners of their texts and free to follow, or not to follow an advice from a supervisor. At the same time, we wonder how students experience such guidance: Is it of help? Do students perceive it as oppressive? Would some students dare to disagree and speak against this type of guidance? How does it affect the student’s relation to the supervisor? What would happen if the supervisor would ask the student what kind of guidance she or he needs or would like to receive at that actual moment?

Most of the answers from our supervisors show that the supervisors encourage their students to write in students’ own language. In our interpretation that is in line with Elbow’s observation of students’ voice awareness: “Students at all levels instinctively talk and think about voice, or their voice in their writing ...” (2007, p. 170).

The answers also show some tendencies regarding the supervisors’ strategies, but it is not possible to draw clear conclusions based on answers from a selection of few respondents. However, both the explicit answers from and voices of the supervisors and the reported student challenges, needs and voices confirm the findings from the two studies mentioned above: Students need guidance focusing on what academic texts are and how to write such texts. In other words, supervisors and students need to pay attention to text characteristics and aspects of voice(s) in texts, in writing and reading.

Summing up, the answers from the supervisors illustrate the following main guidance strategies, addressing students’ challenges and needs:

- to write and rewrite a lot and – and we will add: practising different genres
- to motivate students to read – that means to become acquainted with and enter into dialogue with a variety of genres, sources and voices
- to use examples of good pieces of writing – and we add: for instance with the intention of attending to content or meaning in a first reading and then to voice aspects in a second reading, or vice versa
- to focus on language and style – i.e. voice – in students’ texts.

Which strategies empower students' voices?

We advocate that by analysing, comparing and practising different academic genres, focusing on use of pronouns and use of sources, students will gain awareness and knowledge of different ways of using voice. If students are invited – by a supervisor – to write many minor assignments or other short texts with an explicit, clear and creative voice, this training will empower them to explore voice aspects and develop their own academic voice: What happens to a text when students use “I” in their texts and become visible writers?

To be able to use different genres, students need to read and write many and different (short) texts and analyse what characterize them with regard to aspects of voice and the use of sources. Students can be given explicit tasks such as to read and write abstracts of texts, a review article and an entry in a reference work. Students can get inviting and inspiring questions from peers and supervisors as feedback and practice writing in different genres, for instance using freewriting, without paying attention to punctuation and spelling (cf. Elbow, 1998, p. 237–238), reading aloud, applying both the text and the voice lens, mentioned earlier, focusing on voice aspects such as pronouns and sources. In this way, meta knowledge of genres, voices and writing is developed and made explicit, and this kind of dialogic strategy can lead to an understanding of what is common and required in different texts and genres.

Finding and using information related to research question(s) is another vital step in writing and research that helps to develop an understanding of academic writing. In their search for information, students can be encouraged to use this work as a part of their research process, instead of viewing sources as “best in the field”, or “must reads”. In this research process the strategies to find and evaluate sources form a research tool. At the same time, students can be encouraged to find sources that are good “to think with”, sources that can contribute to the research field the students work with and to their learning process. By using sources critically, writing with the sources is a means to take a stand on earlier research and to revitalize the sources at hand with the questions the students are working on (Kavli, Mitternacht, Seland, & Solheim, 2014, pp. 26–27).

Dialogic strategies and concluding remarks and perspectives

Dialogic guidance strategies involve open-ended questions, confrontations and discussions to explore academic writing, for instance connected to specific aspects and uses of voice (cf. Dysthe & Samsara, 2006; Dysthe et al., 2012; Elbow, 1998). Different dialogic strategies used by supervisors – and tutors and student groups with peers and writing centres – can lead the way to what it means to voice academic texts, in different ways, because such strategies often illustrate how different voices meet, inter-relate, diverge and contradict each other.

When voices – and sources – are divergent and contradicting, we can choose to welcome and embrace such contraries, also in students' texts. This choice probably involves a dialogic and open-minded guidance attitude, as expressed in this claim: “The most important aspect of dialogic guidance is that the tutors develop an accepting, receptive, and non-judgemental attitude that is based on a conviction that the best way to assist students is to interact with them, to help them help themselves”. (Broderson, Solheim, Steiner, & Torgersen Oftedal, 2016, p.28).

Supervisors and students can also share reflections, strategies and good examples of the use of voice in different texts and genres, as we have proposed in this article. However, working

with voice will benefit from being explicit and limited to aspects of the use of pronouns and sources and gradually extended to other specific aspects of voice, for instance wording and the use of meta-language. If students work with different aspects of voice, exploring and expressing voice in several contexts, they – and their supervisors – are likely to become more aware of who they are as writers and how to interact with sources in academic texts in proper ways, for instance by asking questions in all parts of the writing and research process.

We have tried to answer this question: How can students explore and improve their writing by using different academic genres, sources, and voices in humanities? A useful dialogic strategy is to ask open-ended questions: Which sources will you use and for which purposes? How do you – and experienced authors in texts you read – meet and handle divergent voices in writing?

We propose that students and supervisors practice a new dialogic strategy in academic writing and guidance. This strategy consists of two parts. The first part combines and unites writing short texts representing different genres, drawing on and entering into dialogue with central sources, with different and clear ways of voicing, explicit and implicit voicing. The second part involves reading through Peter Elbow’s two lenses mentioned earlier, the text lens and the voice lens, and then practising rewriting. Techniques as freewriting, preferably by hand, as well as reading out loud and just listening as feedback are worth mentioning here. This strategy can and need to be tested and developed further, for instance in writing groups and in collective guidance sessions with more students and supervisors together.

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