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# Reexamining feedback in the context of different rhetorical patterns of writing

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## Abstract

Drawing upon research on the ways texts work as communication across different disciplines, this study investigated teacher and student feedback practices on three different patterns of writing: comparison-contrast essays, opinion essays, and cause-and-effect essays. The data were collected through three qualitative techniques: interviews, class observations, and an analysis of course documents and student-marked writing. The results showed that the participants did not always adhere to rhetorical features of different writing patterns when giving and responding to feedback. Rather, practices of feedback were majorly shaped by their beliefs about academic writing, assessment, and cognitive issues with rhetorical patterns. The results suggest a need for raising student and teacher awareness of the values of different patterns of writing for subject-domain studies; building a constructive alignment between writing course objectives, course assessment, and feedback practices; and involving students in the academic acculturation process.

**Keywords:** Academic writing, Rhetorical patterns, Linguistic features, Organizational structures, Teacher practices of feedback, Student response to feedback, Written corrective feedback

## Introduction

A crucial challenge that fresh higher education students in second-language contexts may face when transitioning to tertiary education is the need to develop academic writing competence at the university level (Ding & Bruce, 2018). This is because assessment and testing in many academic disciplines are majorly based on students producing different rhetorical patterns of writing, such as “listing, chronological order, cause and effect, classification, argumentation, comparison and contrast, problem and solution” (Smith, 2014, p. 1), which reflect ways that texts work as communication across disciplines such as science, business, journalism and technology, and politics. For example, students who are specialized in technology have to write “a factual description (explaining how something works), a narrative of personal experience (an encounter with a computer helpline), an argumentative essay” (Hyland, 2007, p. 154).

However, to compose coherent, purposeful texts in different disciplines, subject-domain learners need to adhere to academic discourse conventions or what they call rhetorical features. These features go beyond the surface syntactic structures and

vocabulary to incorporate the linguistic features that help to construct and represent knowledge in particular fields of disciplines (Evans & Morrison, 2011). For example, to write a pattern of compare and contrast essay, writers may need to utilize linking devices such as *however*, *although*, and *on the other hand* (Smith, 2014). The rhetorical features are also characterized by their varieties of organizational structures associated with the type of a text, such as elements of introductions and conclusions (Kusel, 1992; Spring et al., 2010; Wei, 2020). The writers need to infer the connections between different patterns of writing and rhetorical features and purposes (Hyland, 2015; Kim, 2020; Smith, 2014; Wei, 2020). In his work about student acculturation that is widely cited in the literature, Bartholomae (1986) states that to succeed in an academic culture, the learner “has to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community” (p. 403).

Many researchers signify the need to expose students to the ways language forms work to construct and represent knowledge in particular fields of disciplines (Ahn, 2012; Ariyanfar, 2020; Baker, 2021; Bartholomae, 1986; Berdanier, 2019; Deng et al., 2022; Ding & Bruce, 2018; Eemeren, 2021; Hyland, 2007, 2015; Kim, 2020; Nesi & Gardner, 2018; Paltridge, 2004; Smith, 2014; Wei, 2020; Yulianti, 2017). Paltridge (2004) emphasizes that until the rhetorical features of different patterns of writing are brought to student conscious awareness, they would remain blurred for them. Hyland (2007) confirms that due to the growth in the modular and the interdisciplinary subjects in the nowadays education, teachers cannot assume that students’ previous experience provides the writing schemata they need for their discipline. This implies that writers may be novice in their disciplines and so they need to identify the rhetorical features associated with successful university writing.

There is a general consensus among researchers that students’ recognition of rhetorical features can be developed through feedback. Its importance is acknowledged by several researchers in genre-based classrooms where it forms a key element for students’ growing control over different patterns of writing (Gardner, 2016; Hasyim, 2020; Hyland, 2015; Pourdana & Asghari, 2021; Smith, 2014; Uzun & Zehir, 2019; Wetzel et al., 2021; Zhang, 2018). These researchers argue that students’ recognition of writing patterns and their ability to infer the connections between linguistic features and purposes can be commonly enhanced through authoritative scaffolding on the rhetorical features of academic writing. The study of Smith (2014) on linking devices that signal a pattern of comparison-and-contrast essays suggests that students need to be helped to recognize various rhetorical patterns in real texts—psychology, science, economics, or history—before replicating them independently.

However, we may need to argue that such assertion is based on speculations and not clearly crystalized in previous research which majorly evaluated writing performance based on the surface features of language including mechanics of language, grammar, content, and organization rather than on the rhetorical features of different patterns of writing. Hence, how different patterns of academic writing inform teacher and student practices of feedback is under-developed and so it deserves further investigation. For example, teacher feedback practices on academic writing have been mostly discussed in literature from the viewpoint that different rhetorical moves place teachers in a position

to reflect and view their students' writing with the communicative needs of particular academic settings. Some educators (e.g., Cheng, 2021; Hyland, 2015; Smith, 2014; Uzun & Zehir Topkaya, 2019) emphasize that the focus of teacher feedback in different patterns of writing goes beyond the surface-level corrections such as syntactic structures and vocabulary to incorporate rhetorical features of texts that serve in communication, whereas actually we need to reconsider that such assertions are not well-grounded in research. Not to mention there is a study conducted by Sommers (1982), which found that most of teachers' given feedback on writing addresses common suggestions, questions, and comments regardless of text types.

Accordingly, we believe that the present study is significant because it will follow a new typology to feedback practices in which rhetorical patterns of writing are taken as the basis of investigating feedback practices in academic writing. This study in particular contributes original work because it explores the use of feedback on these patterns through the practices and beliefs of both teachers and students.

#### **Feedback on different patterns of writing**

Most research on feedback has given much attention to corrective feedback, i.e., correction of errors made by students, which has been and remains one of the most investigated areas in second-language writing research. For example, with regard to written corrective feedback, Liu and Brown (2015) found over 300 published papers including reviews, research, and meta-analysis. Nevertheless, all existent research on corrective feedback (e.g., Diab, 2015; Ene & Upton, 2014; Esfandiar et al., 2014; Hashemifardnia et al., 2019; Koltovskaia, 2020; Liu et al., 2022; Mao & Lee, 2020; Mujtaba et al., 2021; Sato & Loewen, 2018; Tang & Liu, 2018; Teng, 2022; Yang et al., 2021; Yin & Tam, 2019; Yu & Hu, 2017; Zheng & Yu, 2018) has given much attention to the correction of grammatical errors and stylistic and organizational deficiencies and almost no focus on the rhetorical features of different patterns of writing that subject-domain students are required to adhere in their assessment, raising questions regarding the usefulness of these studies in the context of academic writing in different disciplines. In support, Pearson (2022a) presents a typology of teachers' options for providing written feedback in L2 writing settings, synthesized from 30 years of empirical research. One strategy he identified is "focus or target" which refers to the range of textual features the teacher focuses on. These features merely included form (lexis, grammar, and mechanics), the quality of the text overall, and/or discourse (content and organization).

Additionally, previous research on corrective feedback focuses on an over-simplified model of feedback practices, i.e., feedback is transferred from a teacher to a student through oral or written comments. It should be argued that this model may fall short of explicating the social practices of writing and the influences that may promote or restrict feedback practices on different patterns of writing. According to recent research (Boyes et al., 2021; Crusan et al., 2016; Hodges et al., 2021; Liu & Yu, 2022; Zhang & Hyland, 2022; Zhou et al., 2022), the social practice of writing evolves using the language appropriately within the constraints of the immediate context of place and participants, and the broader contexts of ideologies and power relations. For example, teachers' practices for feedback could be tied with their philosophy of writing and teaching, and as a consequence, they may be resistant to implement any institutional policy about academic

writing that contradicts their personal beliefs regarding various aspects of feedback (Han & Hyland, 2015; Kılıçkaya, 2022; Lee, 2008, 2009; Lee & Mohebbi, 2020; Lira-Gonzales et al., 2021; Mahfoodh & Pandian, 2011; Orrell, 2006; Yang et al., 2021). In fact, their beliefs can themselves be restricted by assessment criteria, i.e., the standards against which student writing is evaluated (Cobbold & Wright, 2021; Lee, 2003, 2008, 2009; Li & Barnard, 2011; Orrell, 2006). The studies of Orrell (2006) and Lee (2008, 2009), for instance, revealed that teachers tended to evaluate students' texts based on the extent to which they adhered to marking criteria, which rhetorical features were not part of, because they did not want to be blamed by college leaders for less than exemplary exam results.

In addition to teacher practices, research on feedback should also consider student response to it, an area that has not been explored adequately in previous research on rhetorical patterns of writing. It is obvious from the above discussion that feedback on rhetorical features aims to acculturate students from a one-way process which does not acknowledge student identity; it does not deal with the issue of the student experience in new norms and structures of their discipline and how they struggle with their identity in the light of the unequal power relations in the institution. Nevertheless, underestimating students' identity and experience and forcing them to undertake the dominant academic literacy practices prevalent in higher education institutions do not guarantee their full engagement with feedback provided on these conventions. According to some research, student response to feedback is majorly influenced by their attitudes, beliefs, and preferences which may contradict institutional practices of academic writing (Berg & Lu, 2017; Ene & Yao, 2021; Fithriani, 2018; Lee & Mohebbi, 2020; Mahfoodh, 2017; Pearson, 2022b; Sayed & Curabba, 2020; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010; Yu et al., 2020; Yu & Hu, 2017; Zhang & Hyland, 2022; Zhou et al., 2022). In a recent study conducted by Liu and Yu (2022), a multidimensional framework is proposed informed by theoretical and empirical studies, to provide a more dynamic understanding of L2 writing feedback in higher education. In their framework, they suggest that L2 writing feedback should not be merely viewed as a form of scaffolding for students in their acquisition of writing, but as a series of processes that are based on the textual, the cognitive, and the social dimensions of learning. They emphasize that these dimensions are the basics for developing L2 writers' identities.

In this sense, some researchers (Ellis, 2010 as cited in Han & Hyland, 2015; Liu, 2021; Zhang & Hyland, 2022) argue that student response to feedback is subjected to three types of engagement which are:

- Cognitive engagement, i.e., how students attend to the feedback they receive
- Behavioral engagement which refers to how students uptake or revise their feedback
- Attitudinal engagement that concerns how students feel about their feedback

The researchers emphasize that these three levels of engagement interplay with each other. Students, for example, may have difficulty to engage cognitively with their teachers' comments on academic conventions of different patterns of writing, especially in a new discipline and when switching between subjects (Carless, 2006; Lea & Street, 1998), and in order to understand and uptake feedback related to such conventions, it is

commonly known that students tend to seek assistance from friends, relatives, and the Internet when revising their feedback (Ellis, 2010 as cited in Han & Hyland, 2015; Han & Hyland, 2015; Liu, 2021; Zhang & Hyland, 2022). However, their search for clarification can be majorly influenced by their attitudinal engagement such as extrinsic motivation, i.e., their desire to have high marks (Gibbs, 2006; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Laflen & Smith, 2017; Seviour, 2015; Weaver, 2006). Seviour asserts that learners tend to devote much time and energy to engage with their academic courses in order to reach the specific grades required by these courses before entering their degree program.

### Research agenda

Having reviewed relevant studies, the provision of feedback in second-language writing seems to fall behind the rhetorical patterns of writing since common feedback practices still belong to elements of language features. Moreover, the new typology of feedback (i.e., feedback on rhetorical patterns) has not attracted sufficient attention among second-language writing studies and therefore it falls short of explicating the influences that may promote or restrict feedback practices on different patterns of writing. Considering the shortcomings of common practices of feedback in which texts are treated as a group of structures forming a whole, and to achieve the direction of assessment and testing in university, i.e., to enable students write different patterns of writing required in their discipline, this study aims to consider how texts are created within student discourse communities and the different influences on feedback practices. Specifically, the study explores the extent to which teachers and students adhere to rhetorical features of academic writing in their feedback practices and then explore the reasons behind their practices to offer effective implications for teaching and learning.

Two research questions are utilized to guide this study.

- How do teachers provide feedback on different patterns of writing?
- How do students respond to feedback provided on different patterns of writing?

The study found the genre approach as the most appropriate one to explore feedback practices on different rhetorical patterns of writing. The genre approach to teaching writing could be considered as one of the most approaches that attune with discipline needs. Writing in this approach is informed by the different genres that have their particular ways of meaning making which are valued by a certain discipline's discourse community (Ariyanfar, 2020; Yulianti, 2017). These genres include the rhetorical and linguistic patterns of different professional and academic target texts such as news reports, government and business reports, police or incident reports, insurance claims, short stories, novels, brochures, instruction manuals, textbooks, essays, and editorials (Ahn, 2012).

Pedagogically, the genre approach intends to give students access to the genre of power through equipping them with the requirements and demands of writing in particular academy settings (Ahn, 2012; Ariyanfar, 2020; Paltridge, 2004; Yulianti, 2017). It is entrenched in the notion that writing is a context-dependent practice, governed by the relationship between language, text, and context, i.e., by the specific linguistic forms and features the students select to manifest their meaning. It makes teachers focus

on essential rhetorical features needed for discipline (Ariyanfar, 2020; Hyland, 2007; Yulianti, 2017). Hyland states that the genre approach makes teachers in a better position in reflecting on their students' writing and see their work with a more critical eye as they go with them in categorizing and analyzing particular types of texts and so this makes students more attuned with their own ways of creating writing and be more sensitive towards rhetorical features in a specific genre.

In particular, the current study focused on one type of genre that is widely used in assessment in higher education which is essay writing. The study specifically focuses on three micro-genres introduced in a higher education institute in Oman, namely, comparison-contrast essays, opinion essays, and cause-and-effect essays, which come together in the writing of an academic essay (macro-genre). The micro-genres are smaller sections of texts that have particular rhetorical patterns including descriptions, reports, and arguments (Paltridge, 2018). It is argued that focusing on micro-genres helps learners to deal appropriately with varying rhetorical expectations of different text types that define their field of discipline (Paltridge, 2018).

### **Methodology**

A case study—including three teachers and their 18 students from three different disciplines which were Informational Technology, Business Administration, and Communication (six students in each class)—was chosen for the current research. This research found a naturalistic qualitative case study approach suitable to explore feedback practices on rhetorical patterns of writing. The qualitative case study examines the phenomenon as being socially constructed in the minds of subjects and within situational constraints (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Hence, this enables researchers to understand and describe a social phenomenon and give contextual interpretations of it. The case study in particular fits the current study because it provides an in-depth and comprehensive account of the context (Yin, 2013).

### **The selected writing course**

An academic writing course, namely *English 1222*, was selected in this study. Based on the course specifications, *English 1222* is designed for students with an IELTS equivalence of 4.5. The number of teaching hours per week is six. (There are roughly 15 teaching weeks per semester.) The name of the course textbook used for *English 1222* is "Effective Academic Writing" (Savage & Mayer, 2012). *English 1222* is designed to follow the syllabus of the second half of the book. It builds upon the work on the first half of the book introduced in *English 1111*.

*English 1222* was purposefully selected for two reasons. First, not only has the course covered and been organized around different patterns of essay, but it also incorporates well-established practices in feedback on these patterns (e.g., editing, redrafting, peer- and self-evaluation), though it should be clarified that teachers are eventually flexible in providing their own feedback practices. Second, as this study mainly seeks to explore feedback on patterns of writing intensively, then *English 1222* is more suitable because it introduces three patterns of essay: comparison-contrast essays, opinion essays, and cause-and-effect essays (see Table 1), whereas *English 1111* introduces only two patterns of essay alongside an introduction to paragraph structures and essay organization in

**Table 1** Patterns of essay introduced in English 1222

	Academic focus	Rhetorical focus	Language and grammar focus
Comparison-contrast essays	Travel and tourism	Comparison-contrast organization	Comparison and contrast connectors Comparatives in comparison-contrast essays Comparatives in sentences
Opinion essays	Technology	Opinion organization Facts and opinions Counter-argument and refutation	Quantity expressions in opinion essays Connectors to show support and opposition
Cause-and-effect essays	Education and economics	Cause-and-effect organization Clustering information	Phrasal verbs The future with will <i>Will</i> with <i>so that</i> Future possibilities with <i>if</i> clause

Note. Adapted from "Effective academic writing 2: teacher's resource book" by Savage and P. Mayer, 2012, Oxford: Oxford University Press

**Table 2** Teachers' qualifications and experience

Teacher	Education	Teaching experience
Teacher A	BA in English Literature MA in English Language Teaching	9 years 8 academic writing courses
Teacher B	BA Applied Linguistic MA degree in Translation Studies	11 years 6 academic writing courses
Teacher C	Diploma in TESOL MA Applied Linguistics and TESOL	13 years and a half 9 academic writing courses

Unit One. In fact, by the time they take *English 1222*, students would have more experience to express their opinions and beliefs about different patterns of an academic essay.

### The participants

This study explored feedback practices in three classes from three different disciplines as declared earlier: Informational Technology, Business Administration, and Communication. As mentioned, there were three teachers and their 18 students (six students in each class) who participated in the study. The participants were selected based on convenience sampling, which seeks for easy accessibility and willingness of participants (Dornyei, 2007). By this type of sampling, the participants may not be representative; however, this is not an issue in qualitative research which advocates that reality is in the minds of individuals and varies from one individual to another (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The teachers who volunteered to take part in the study had different qualifications and levels of experience in teaching academic writing courses, as shown in Table 2.

The students who were a mixture of boys and girls were in their first year of studying. They had just passed an English Challenge Test (consisted of listening, speaking, reading, and writing) that was equivalent to IELTS 4.5. They were monolingual learners whose first language was Arabic. These students had already taken some academic writing courses in their foundation year. The academic writing courses in the university in

question start from the foundation year (levels D, C, B, and A) and then continue during the first and second years of the degree program. In the foundation year, the students learn to write some types of genre including secondary research, reports, emails, and application forms, and two types of essays: descriptive and recursive essays. Each academic writing course in the foundation year is allocated 10 h per week (15 weeks per semester) and aims to prepare students to enter their degree program and study their subject-domain modules through the medium of English.

### Data collection

To explore feedback practices on different patterns of essay in a natural setting and to provide a detailed and comprehensive account of the context, data was collected throughout a whole semester of an academic year through qualitative techniques, including semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. The data collection was conducted in five steps to answer the two research questions listed at the end of the previous section. Firstly, all participants were interviewed to explore their general beliefs about feedback practices and different patterns of essay writing. With regard to students, the study held a focus group, i.e., all participating students in each class were gathered for an interview. The study purposefully chose focus groups because of being "... data rich, flexible, stimulating to respondents and aiding their recall, and cumulative and elaborative, over and above individual responses" (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 365).

Secondly, all instructional materials related to *English 1222*, the course selected for studying, were collected. These included the course description, the course textbook, and the rating scale for the final writing exam. Thirdly, 6-week observations per class were conducted. In agreement with the course teachers, the observations were conducted when the teachers provided oral feedback on students' writing. After each observation, the participants were interviewed to explore their intentions, feelings, experiences, and thoughts about their feedback practices on different patterns of writing. Fourthly, all participating students' first and second drafts were collected for analysis. There were 54 first drafts and 54 s drafts. (Each student wrote 2 drafts of 3 types of essay introduced in the course.) Finally, the participants were interviewed for the last time to explore their overall impressions of their oral and written feedback and the college instructions and guidance regarding academic writing and feedback.

### Ethical considerations

All participants in this study were required to sign a consent form approved by the college in question that clarifies the purpose of the study and types of data required. The

**Table 3** Composition of classes and participants' labeling

Classes	Teachers	Students
Class A	Teacher A	GAS1, GAS2, GAS3, GAS4, GAS5, GAS6
Class B	Teacher B	GBS1, GBS2, GBS3, GBS4, GBS5, GBS6
Class C	Teacher C	GCS1, GCS2, GCS3, GCS4, GCS5, GCS6



consent also covers how long the data will be kept. Additionally, to protect their identity, the participants are labeled as shown in Table 3.

### Analysis

The analysis of the current study followed two steps as clarified in the following sub-sections.

#### Step 1: linking the raw data to research questions

Following the recommendation of Gläser and Laudel (2013), all raw data were linked to their relevant questions, i.e., the data were separated based on research questions. This step was essential because each research question aimed to answer a different aspect of the analysis, and therefore, it was significant to initially decide which aspect of the analysis or question the information belonged to. Table 4 illustrates the link between data collection and research questions of the study.

#### Step 2: categorizing-based approach

Second, the study followed the categorizing-based approach to qualitative data analysis which entailed searching for patterns or themes and identifying connections between them (Maxwell & Miller, 2008). It deployed one of the most commonly utilized types of categorizing strategies in qualitative research which was thematic coding that sorted data into themes. Themes are patterns or units of similarity that combine similar data by their generic relationships (Maxwell & Miller, 2008). For example, the following excerpt was coded as “teacher beliefs about academic writing.”

*I believe that a good writer is the one who is able to... to ... write correct grammatical sentences, you know... also, should have correct spelling ... punctuation and capitalization, and also should be able to utilize suitable and formal vocabulary needed for the task as well as complex sentences. This is exactly what makes your essay readable and well-written. (Teacher C's Interview Following Observation 2)*

**Table 4** Linking collected data to research questions

	Data collection
Research question 1: teacher feedback practices	Students' first essays (the ones marked by teachers) Class observations College documents Teachers' interviews
Research question 2: student response to feedback	Students' first- and second-draft essays Class observations College documents Students' interviews

The categorizing process was facilitated by using NVivo10, a software program that helps to sort and save data into their relevant categories (Castleberry, 2014).

The thematic coding went through three stages as will be clarified below.

### **Stage 1: coding practices of feedback**

The analysis first started with coding teachers' focus of feedback and students' response to it to explore the extent to which they both adhered to rhetorical features in their feedback practices.

*Teacher focus of feedback* Teacher practices of feedback on students' first drafts (54 drafts: 3 drafts per student) were classified into different themes depending on their focus for feedback. For example, the following extract taken from G2S4's draft was classified as "teacher feedback on mechanics of language" (green color) and "teacher feedback on grammar" (yellow color) (Fig. 1).

However, it should be clarified that not all feedback was provided directly as the above example. There were many ways that teachers followed when responding to students' writing—codes, explanations, hints, referring to page numbers in text or reference books, etc.

From this analysis of direct and indirect written feedback, five practices for focus of feedback emerged, as shown in Table 5. It should be clarified that essay organization does not concern specific structures of certain rhetorical patterns. Rather, it concerns the structure of paragraphs such as topic sentence and coherence and unity as well as some language features related to the types of sentences and clauses.

Is social media important nowadays? Social media is one of the most important technologies in the world. It has many advantages and disadvantages.

**Fig. 1** Analysis of student drafts, G2S4's first draft

**Table 5** Focus of feedback identified in the analysis

Focus of feedback	Description
Rhetorical features	Organization structures and linguist features of a certain type of essay such as verb tense, connectors, quantity expressions, comparatives, prepositional phrases, phrasal verbs, adjectives
Essay organization	The topic sentence, and coherence and unity, some language features related to the types of sentences and clauses
Grammar	Accuracy of grammar use
Vocabulary	Correct vocabulary use
Mechanics of language	Spelling, capitalization, punctuation

*Students' response to feedback* Students' response to feedback provided on first drafts was categorized into (1) incorrect revision (blue circle), (2) correct revision (red circle), and (3) no revision (yellow circle). To be reminded, 54 s drafts were analyzed to explore students' response to feedback provided on their first drafts (3 drafts per student) (Fig. 2).

### **Stage 2: the number of coding references**

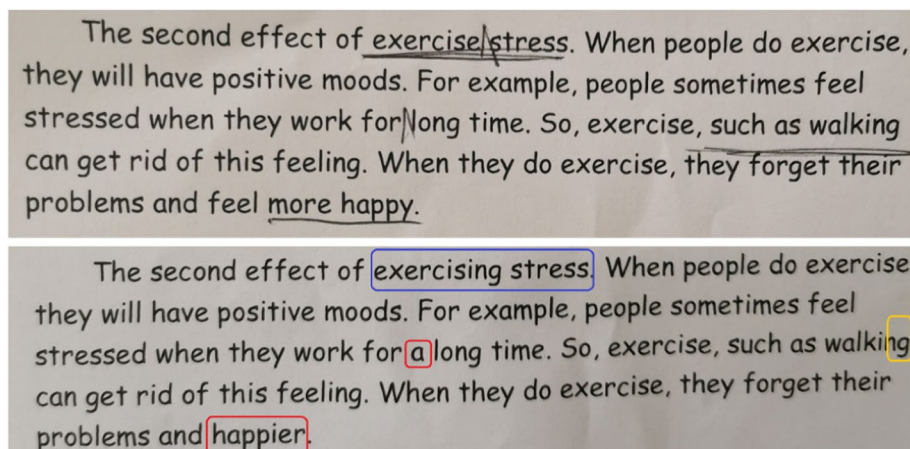
After coding practices of feedback, some statistical data were measured. These included the coding frequencies of feedback practices to show the main emphases of teachers' focus of feedback as well as the extent to which students responded to feedback provided on different areas of writing. The quantitative data were needed to provide evidence for certain emphases and practices.

The study also explored the coding frequency of unmarked errors, i.e., errors that occurred in students' writing but were not marked by teachers. As clarified in the "Methodology" section, teachers were given flexibility in their feedback practices rather than being restricted by some university guidelines and policy. The identification of unmarked errors was necessary to reinforce the evidence for teachers' feedback emphasis on some areas rather than others. These unmarked errors were identified and counted through a second evaluation of students' first drafts by the researcher and the participating teachers using the same coding scheme utilized for the analysis of teachers' focus of feedback (see Table 5).

### **Stage 3: the reasons behind feedback practices**

Step 3 explored why some teachers provided more feedback on some areas than others and why they tended to ignore other areas. It also explored why students' response to feedback on different areas of writing including rhetorical features varied.

This step was mainly derived directly from the teachers' and students' follow-up interviews when they were asked for the reasons of their practices. However, such an analysis



**Fig. 2** Analysis of student response to feedback, GCS4's first and second drafts

was substantiated by the collected college documents, observations, and the participants' first and final interviews.

## Results

The findings revealed from the analysis are outlined at the outset of the following sub-sections.

### Teacher practices of feedback on academic writing

The first question aimed to explore teacher practices of feedback on different patterns of writing. The number of coding references broken down by focus of feedback is given in Table 6; this analysis covers the three teachers' written feedback provided on all the participating students' marked essays. The table also included unmarked errors to explore the reasons why teachers did not provide feedback on these errors.

It could be seen from Table 6 that the three teachers varied in their focus of feedback. For example, the main emphases of feedback for teachers A and C were on surface features of writing, such as linguistic structures, vocabulary, and organization on academic essays. Teacher C, for instance, provided greater emphases on grammar (104), followed by mechanics of language (98) and vocabulary (49). On the other hand, teacher's B feedback was mostly on rhetorical features of certain rhetorical patterns (169).

Overall, the results revealed that teachers' focus of feedback was mainly due to their beliefs about academic writing. For instance, teacher B provided much feedback on rhetorical features because he believed that academic writing should entail training learners to successfully handle different writing tasks encountered in a higher education setting and meeting their needs for strategies and academic skills that satisfy the expectations of their academic discourse community. He strongly emphasized that academic writing teachers should intend to enculturate learners into the discipline community and enable them to write within the norms and structures of their discipline. In fact, in all his interviews, teacher B frequently expressed his satisfaction with the rhetorical approach to teaching academic writing introduced in *English 1222*, the course selected for studying.

*When students move to studying their subject courses, they will be required to write essays and depending on their purposes or the focus of their writing, they will have to choose one type of these essays. I mean ... These structures and the specific language of each essay, I am sure, will help them to communicate their meaning clearly and more successfully. For example, if you want to write an argument and you want to*

**Table 6** Frequency of coding references for feedback by teachers

	Teacher A		Teacher B		Teacher C	
	Feedback provided	Unmarked errors	Feedback provided	Unmarked errors	Feedback provided	Unmarked errors
Rhetorical features	12	109	169	12	18	159
Essay organization	111	21	112	4	101	101
vocabulary	32	7	0	18	49	7
Grammar	155	23	98	53	104	31
Mechanics of language	53	4	0	41	98	34

*be more persuasive in your opinions, you need to include the counter-argument first. You can't start immediately with your refutation. (Teacher B, Interview Following Observation 4)*

On the other hand, the other two teachers provided less feedback on rhetorical features (teacher A: 12 marked errors out of 121 errors, teacher C: 18 out of 177) because they did not believe on their value in academic writing. They regarded the types of essays and their conventional rhetorical structures unrelated to real-world practices, i.e., the students' subsequent subject-domain studies. The two teachers believed that along with the accuracy of grammar use, writers need to know the range of vocabulary that is required for the task as well as adhere to the correct use of mechanics of language such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. As confirmed by the two teachers in their interviews, there is no college policy about giving feedback (see the "Methodology" section for substantiation); therefore, they preferred to construct feedback based on their beliefs which contradicted the rhetorical approach introduced in *English 1222*.

Added to their beliefs, the two teachers' interviews revealed that another reason for their resistance to provide feedback on rhetorical features was the course assessment criteria, i.e., these features were not assessed in the final writing exam. Indeed, their interviews can be further substantiated by the number of coding references shown in Table 6 which demonstrated that the teachers including teacher B provided much feedback on the marking criteria set for the final writing exam which were essay organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics of language. For example, as presented in Table 6, the teachers were found to place much emphasis on essay organization (teacher A: 111, teacher B: 112, teacher C 101) though this area was not reflected in their beliefs about good academic essays. It should be reminded that essay organization in the marking criteria does not concern specific structures of certain rhetorical patterns; rather, it covers the structure of paragraphs including the topic sentence and coherence and unity as well as some language features related to the types of sentences and clauses.

### Student response to feedback

The second research question aimed to explore how learners revise feedback provided on different patterns of writing and identify the reasons behind their revision. Table 7

**Table 7** Frequency of coding references for students' response to feedback

		Rhetorical features	Essay organization	Vocabulary	Grammar	Mechanics of language
Incorrect revision	Group A	3	87	1	14	0
	Group B	37	8	-	6	-
	Group C	9	11	6	5	2
Correct revision	Group A	2	19	6	139	4
	Group B	100	105	-	90	-
	Group C	5	86	39	97	95
No revision	Group A	7	5	0	2	0
	Group B	32	9	-	2	-
	Group C	4	4	4	2	1

presents the number of coding references for students' revision of feedback provided on 54 first-draft essays (3 essays per student). As could be seen from the table, students responded differently to their feedback. Generally, many participants seemed to ignore feedback provided on rhetorical features, for example, group B had 32 uncorrected rhetorical feature errors out of 169 marked errors (i.e., errors picked up by the teachers). In contrast, they acted more seriously on other areas; for example, in case of feedback provided on grammar, group C had only two wrong corrections and one uncorrected error out of 85 marked errors.

Parallel to teachers' feedback practices, the results showed a similar link between students' beliefs about academic writing and their response to feedback. According to their interviews, all students had a great appeal for feedback on grammar, vocabulary, and mechanic of language because they believe on their values in constructing a good essay. On the other hand, they did not believe on the value of rhetorical patterns for their subsequent subject-domain studies and did not see why they are expected to develop competence in writing different patterns of texts; therefore, they were less engaged with feedback provided on rhetorical features.

GAS6: I like feedback on grammar and spelling, punctuation.

GAS5: Me too

GAS2: Also vocabulary

GAS1: Yes, everything

Researcher: Everything including the specific features related to certain types of essay?

GAS1: No no, not this features

GAS3: Yes, why we need these features?!

GAS6: No need to these features

Researcher: So, why are you introduced to them in your course textbook?

GAS5: We don't know. It is not useful.

Researcher: Are they?! Do you all agree?

((Group A nodded their heads))

GAS1: No one write with these feature.

Researcher: So, tell me why are you studying how to write essays this semester?

GAS6: I don't know. Maybe because in the future we will write essay.

Researcher: You mean next year when you study your subject-domain courses?

GAS6: Yes

Researcher: And you don't think you need to adhere to these specific features related to different types of essay?

CAS6: No

GAS4: Teacher, my sister is final year now studying IT (Informational Technology). She tell me that we don't need to learn this features because she is not use them in essay. (Group A's Interview Following Observation 3)

In addition to students' beliefs about academic writing, the assessment was also found to have an impact on their response to feedback. In their interviews, the students confirmed that their attention was paid more to the areas marked in their final writing exam. The number of coding references can provide further evidence for this. As Table 7 shows, students responded more effectively to feedback provided on areas related to marking criteria compared to feedback provided on rhetorical features. For instance,

most students responded effectively to feedback provided on essay organization, which is one of the marking criteria, as the number of corrected errors largely exceeded the uncorrected ones. Group A, for instance, had only five uncorrected errors out of 111 marked errors. It should be reminded that essay organization was not mentioned as an important area in academic writing in students' interviews.

In fact, due to the influence of assessment, students acknowledged that they sought clarification from their teachers, classmates, friends, and relatives on their feedback that was provided on language features and essay organization before submitting their second drafts as these areas were linked to marking criteria of the final writing exam. This search for clarification may then explain why students responded more accurately to feedback provided on these areas than feedback given on rhetorical features, for example, as shown in Table 7, for rhetorical features, group B had 37 incorrect revision out of 169 marked errors, while for essay organization, they had only eight incorrect revision out of 122 marked errors.

However, in other cases, students' search for assistance was promoted by their teachers' strategies for providing feedback. Based on class observations, unlike teachers A and C, teacher B conducted self- and peer-editing tasks from the course textbook which focused on evaluating rhetorical features, as well as individual oral discussions to clarify his written feedback, especially indirect feedback. (To be reminded, both teachers A and C were against the rhetorical approach to teaching academic writing.) Therefore, group B was found to be more successful in correcting errors related to rhetorical features than the other two groups: group C, for instance, had nine incorrect revisions and five correct revision, while group B had 37 incorrect revision and 100 correct revision. In fact, both teacher B and group B admitted that the oral discussions and the self- and peer-editing tasks they had in their classes facilitated the challenges of distinguishing different rhetorical features of different texts. The students appreciated being involved in these discussions and evaluating their own and peers' performance because they believed that such tasks helped them to develop competence in the academic discourse conventions. However, it should be stated that this comparison may be inaccurate as both groups A and C received relatively little feedback on rhetorical features compared to group B (see Table 6 in the previous section). Additionally, this analysis may be after all weak because the number of observations might have not been adequate enough to cover all the practices of oral discussions and peer- and self-evaluation tasks in the three classes.

## Discussion

This study aimed to understand practices of feedback in different patterns of writing which is agreed to be essential for assessment purposes, i.e., assessment in many academic disciplines is majorly based on students producing these patterns (Smith, 2014). Previous research has suggested that students' control of different patterns of writing in their discipline can be enhanced through feedback (Gardner, 2016; Hasyim, 2020; Hyland, 2015; Pourdana & Asghari, 2021; Smith, 2014; Uzun & Zehir, 2019; Wetzels et al., 2021; Zhang, 2018); however, as will be discussed below, the findings of this study generally suggest that both teachers and students do not necessarily take full advantages of feedback provided on rhetorical patterns for three main influences: (1) teacher

and student beliefs about academic writing, (2) assessment, and (3) student cognitive engagement with feedback.

Previous research assumes that different writing patterns place teachers in a position to evaluate their students' writing with the rhetorical features needed for particular academic settings (e.g., Cheng, 2021; Hyland, 2015; Smith, 2014; Uzun & Zehir, 2019). However, this study demonstrated that teachers may not necessarily shape their feedback based on the approach to teaching writing they follow. Although the three teachers followed the rhetorical approach to teaching academic writing as instructed by the course objectives and textbook, it was only teacher B who provide much feedback on rhetorical features when he marked his students' different patterns of writing. On the other hand, both teachers A and C provided limited feedback on these features and substantially more feedback on surface features of language such as grammar, mechanics of language, and vocabulary.

The results of this study found two reasons that may restrict teachers from shaping their feedback on rhetorical features: their beliefs about academic writing and assessment. First, teacher B provided much feedback on rhetorical features that were introduced in students' course textbook because he advocated the rhetorical approach to teaching academic writing. On the other hand, teachers A and C did not believe on the value of rhetorical features and could not see the reasons of introducing them in the course textbook. Therefore, they preferred to provide more feedback on the areas that they thought are essential for a good academic essay such as the use of correct grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics of language such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. This finding then supports previous research that teachers may be resistant to implement any institutional policy about academic writing on their feedback practices when it contradicts their personal beliefs (Han & Hyland, 2015; Kılıçkaya, 2022; Lee, 2008, 2009; Lee & Mohebbi, 2020; Lira-Gonzales et al., 2021; Mahfoodh & Pandian, 2011; Orrell, 2006; Yang et al., 2021). In fact, their resistance can be reinforced by assessment. As shown in the results, the two teachers did not have to focus on rhetorical features in their feedback because they were not part of the rating scale for the final writing exam. The influence of assessment on teacher practices of feedback has been extensively explored in previous research (Cobbold & Wright, 2021; Lee, 2003, 2008, 2009; Li & Barnard, 2011; Orrell, 2006).

The results of this study also suggest that feedback on rhetorical features should not aim to acculturate students through an over-simplified model of feedback practices presented in previous research, i.e., feedback is transferred from a teacher to a student through oral and written comments (see Diab, 2015; Ene & Upton, 2014; Esfandiar et al., 2014; Hashemifardnia et al., 2019; Koltovskaia, 2020; Liu et al., 2022; Mao & Lee, 2020; Mujtaba et al., 2021; Pearson, 2022a; Sato & Loewen, 2018; Tang & Liu, 2018; Teng, 2022; Yang et al., 2021; Yin & Tam, 2019; Yu & Hu, 2017; Zheng & Yu, 2018). Based on the results, feedback on rhetorical patterns is not a one-way process in which the student role is passive. It is cyclic and shared between the teacher and the student. Being involved in the acculturation process helps students to be actively engaged with feedback on rhetorical features. In the current study, it was revealed that students in group B had less difficulty recognizing different patterns of writing and their rhetorical features compared to the other two groups because they received



extensive clarification on them through having follow-up oral discussions with their teachers on their written feedback as well as through performing self- and peer-assessment tasks. Hence, being involved in feedback helps students in interpreting it accurately, a finding that goes in line with previous research (see Lea & Street, 1998; Carless, 2006).

The acculturation process may also require a consideration of student experience in new norms and structures of their discipline and how they struggle with their identity in the light of the unequal power relations in the institution. This study found that students did not value rhetorical features in their writing and did not see why they were expected to develop competence in writing different patterns of texts. This was because their identity and experience were underestimated and that they were not encouraged to be critique to the academic discourse. Therefore, these students were found to carry out more effective revisions when feedback concerned language features (i.e., grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics of language) than rhetorical features of different patterns of essay writing because they believed they were the most essential aspects for developing their academic writing. Previous research has widely referred to the influence of student beliefs and preference on their response to feedback (Berg & Lu, 2017; Ene & Yao, 2021; Fithriani, 2018; Lee & Mohebbi, 2020; Mahfoodh, 2017; Pearson, 2022b; Sayed & Curabba, 2020; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010; Yu et al., 2020; Yu & Hu, 2017; Zhang & Hyland, 2022; Zhou et al., 2022). What may exaggerate the issue is that students' response to feedback can be also impacted by assessment. The results of this study showed that students tended to ignore feedback provided on rhetorical features because they were not rated for assessment. Indeed, previous research has discussed the impact of assessment on student response to feedback (Gibbs, 2006; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Lafen & Smith, 2017; Seviour, 2015; Weaver, 2006). The findings of this study also add that assessment impacts students' search for clarification. Unlike previous research (Ellis, 2010 as cited in Han & Hyland, 2015; Han & Hyland, 2015; Liu, 2021; Zhang & Hyland, 2022), this study revealed that students' search for clarification on their feedback, such as from teachers, friends, and relatives, only occurred when that feedback was related to marking criteria. Hence, this implies that in addition to acculturating students in the feedback process, there is a need to consider assessment to ensure students' effective engagement with feedback provided on rhetorical features.

To conclude, the results of the current study suggest that the over-simplified model of feedback practices presented in previous research, i.e., feedback is transferred from a teacher to a student through oral and written comments (see, Diab, 2015; Ene & Upton, 2014; Esfandiar et al., 2014; Hashemifardnia et al., 2019; Koltovskaia, 2020; Liu et al., 2022; Mao & Lee, 2020; Mujtaba et al., 2021; Pearson, 2022a; Sato & Loewen, 2018; Tang & Liu, 2018; Teng, 2022; Yang et al., 2021; Yin & Tam, 2019; Yu & Hu, 2017; Zheng & Yu, 2018), does not work for developing the different rhetorical patterns of writing because such model ignores how texts are created within student discourse communities and the different influences on feedback practices on rhetorical patterns. Based on the results, the effectiveness of feedback on rhetorical patterns of writing depends on the teacher and student beliefs about the value of these patterns, assessment, and student cognitive engagement with such feedback.

### **Conclusions and implications for classroom**

As discussed above, the results revealed that feedback practices on different rhetorical patterns of writing were influenced by the teacher and student beliefs about academic writing, assessment, and student cognitive engagement with feedback. In the light of these facts, the current study presents some implications and recommendations for teaching and learning.

First, this study suggests both teachers and learners need to cope with the newly introduced rhetorical features and clearly see their values in terms of building essential knowledge base of the linguistic features and organizational structures that satisfy the expectation assessment and testing of their academic discourse community. As the benefits of rhetorical patterns of writing are far from being immediately clear to learners and teachers as stated in their interviews, perhaps then one implication of this research is to show real evidence about their long-term benefits to academic writing in subsequent studies. They may benefit, for instance, from seeing real samples of different patterns of essays written for subject-domain modules or from arranging meetings between them and subject-domain teachers to clarify the values of different rhetorical patterns for subsequent studies.

Alternatively, in order to fully achieve the objectives of an academic writing course, another implication of the study is to build a constructive alignment between the course content, the marking criteria, and feedback practices. The study showed that assessment can be a motive for teachers and students to shape their feedback based on marking criteria. Accordingly, to make teachers and their students effectively responsive to feedback on rhetorical features, there is a need to link these features not only to the course content but also to the marking criteria.

Finally, there is a need to consider how students engage with feedback provided on rhetorical features. When students enter higher education, they are expected to develop competence in writing different patterns of texts because these are the main tools of assessment in their disciplines. In other words, university students have to deal with new identities of thinking and making meaning that may conflict what they are used to. Teachers then need to consider students' experience and attempt to shift their identity into the new institutional culture. However, as the results of this study suggests, teachers should take a critical stance on this issue and call for a reciprocal relationship between students and their institutions. That is to say, they should encourage students to be active in the academic acculturation process and be critique to the academic discourse. Being involved in this acculturation process, e.g., through follow-up discussions and self- and peer-evaluation tasks, may change their negative attitudes towards different patterns of writing and minimize variations and challenges in students' misinterpretation of feedback that are caused by the change from one subject, topic, or module to the next.

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#### **Author's contributions**

Having reviewed relevant studies, the provision of feedback in second-language writing seems to fall behind the rhetorical patterns of writing since the common feedback practices still belong to elements of language features. Furthermore, the new typology of feedback (i.e., feedback on rhetorical features) has not attracted sufficient attention among second-language writing studies especially empirical research, and so, this suggests a need to explore this area in depth before drawing any conclusion. In this study, we attempt to address these gaps in the literature and come up with research-based conclusions with respect to how teachers and students respond to feedback on rhetorical features of different

patterns of writing. Specifically, the study explores the extent to which teachers and students adhere to rhetorical features of academic writing in their feedback practices and then explore the reasons that impact their practices to offer effective implications of feedback. The author(s) read and approved the final manuscript.

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