What is at stake?

- Completion rates in Australian universities are between 50% and 60% (Carlino, 2012).

- Students’ difficulties with research writing are a significant contributor to these low completion rates (Aitchison and Lee 2006).
Faculty of Science and Engineering

1100 HDR students spread over 5 schools

Science

The WA School of Mines

Chemical and Petroleum Engineering

Electrical Engineering and Computing

Civil and Mechanical Engineering
Our Students

Composition: 632 Domestic, 468 International
Research Writing

Supervisors
Tacit knowledge of research writing
Skills related to research writing often reduced to “English”

Students
Often dissatisfied with input and feedback on research writing
Solution (Administrators and Decision Makers)?

We’ll just send them to the ALL people to fix them up…
Assumption…

The teaching and learning of research writing is often perceived as part of learning ‘academic literacy’ and separate from the research teaching and learning process; it is not considered as part of research supervision and is often left to the students to develop as an individual skill (Cadman, 2000; Aitchinson & Lee, 2006; Li & Vandermensbrugghe, 2012; Murray, 2012).
Note: Interesting finding

Supervisors felt handicapped by their own lack of knowledge of academic literacy to support students in research writing, yet many of these same supervisors are reluctant to refer students to ‘academic literacy’ advisors, whose support was seen as too generic (Hammond et.al., 2010).
Why?

Discourse conventions are so deeply embedded within the psyche of the discipline specialist that its practices become routine (Aitchison, Catterall, Ross & Burgin, 2012) and, consequently, unarticulated.
Thinking out of the box…

Byrnes (2011, p. 147) proposes that ‘educational knowing … occurs at the intersection of language, learning and knowledge.’

Educational Knowing

- Language
- Learning
- Knowledge
Byrnes’s proposition is fundamental in light of Aitchinson and Lee’s call to acknowledge writing as ‘the practice as well as the site of the production and exchange of knowledge’ (2006, p.266) and to the concept of writing as a means of facilitating thinking and knowledge construction.
Moving on…

- Research writing is a complex phenomenon as it is a unique literacy practice.
- It requires the writer to be competent in ‘content or disciplinary knowledge’ and also to engage with the ‘cultural assumptions’ and ‘ideological values’ of the discipline that are enacted through language (Canagarajah, 2011).
FSE’s HDR Research Writing Approach

Based on Hyland’s (2011) Model
Example:

Online Research Writing Modules

Focus of modules:

- Writing to achieve a purpose
- Writing as communication
- Providing metalanguage for identifying genres and structures
- Writing to meet expectations of target discourse communities
THANK YOU
References