

Book Review

Curry, M. J., He, F., Li, W., Zhang, T., Zuo, Y., Altalouli, M., & Ayesh, J. (2021). *An A to W of Academic Literacy: Key Concepts and Practices for Graduate Students*. University of Michigan Press.

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In the 2018-2019 academic year, the number of international students registered at Canadian universities rose to over 318,000 (Government of Canada, 2020). Hailing from diverse linguistic and socioeconomic backgrounds, these students face unique challenges when starting academic studies in Canada. But it is not just international students, and not just graduate students, who can benefit from Curry et al.'s (2021) *An A to W of Academic Literacy: Key Concepts and Practices for Graduate Students*. Any first-generation academics, undergraduates in writing-heavy programs, and instructors will find this text useful, too.

Mary Jane Curry is a professor of language education, literacy, and academic writing and publishing at the University of Rochester. Her research focuses on the ways in which academic language and discourse act as an impediment to students who have learned English as an additional language. Previous publications of hers include *Academic Writing in a Global Context: The Politics and Practices of Publishing in English*, and *A Scholar's Guide to Getting Published in English*. Adding to this list but diverging in format, *An A to W of Academic Literacy* is a glossary of terminology commonly used in academia. Each term listed explains how it relates to different forms of writing, and its use in academic language. Though it is written from an American perspective, Curry et al. has taken care to note within entries any differences of use in the UK, Canada, and elsewhere. Thus, the book can be helpful for a variety of academics working across borders, disciplinary and otherwise.

While *An A to W of Academic Literacy* is written with international graduate students studying in a U.S. context in mind, the scope of its usefulness goes beyond this group. Over the past ten years, I have taught writing and reading to undergraduate and graduate students from China, Saudi Arabia,

the Congo, Mexico, France, and a handful of other countries. I have also taught students from Canada—native English speakers who graduated from Canadian high schools. Designing entry-level writing and reading curriculums and classes for these groups is not as different as you might think. Many students starting at university find that the academy's particular parlance is new and intimidating to them; while they may understand the word "thesis," they do not necessarily understand it in the same way their professors may be using it.

Each entry includes a description of the term, supported by a synthesis of literature derived from a diverse group of academic literacy scholars. Curry et al. take care to cite research sources to ensure that any subtleties or differences across disciplines and geolinguistic contexts—even those that might seem obvious to some—are accounted for. Further to these explanations, the appendix offers additional readings, and expands on each term with more links and citations. As a result, readers will have a myriad of options to go beyond the two-page-long definitions of each term if they feel they need further information, or a more nuanced explanation.

The writing is straight-forward and meant to be accessible to students of any language background. Entries include highlighted differences across disciplines under the heading "Variations and Tensions" so that, for example, art and design students understand how "critique" is used also to refer to a book review. There are 65 terms in total that are listed and defined, and each entry includes reflection questions intended to help students localize the words within their own work and discipline. These reflection questions would make an excellent short assignment if one were to use this text as a class text, too.

What separates this volume from other guides for academic writing is the unique co-authorship. Except for Curry, each of the authors are international graduate students studying at Rochester University in the U.S. Because of this, the authors contribute varied perspectives that highlight the different ways certain terms might be understood depending on the context. The result is a relatable text I am certain my students would be happy to read. For instance, the entry on "metadiscourse" includes an example of how one author used "transitions to show connections" between ideas, as well as other forms of metadiscourse to walk "readers through the text" (Curry et al., 2021, p. 71).

I mentioned that undergrad students would benefit from this guide, too, and this is true; it is, however, geared to graduate students, including terms like "dissertation" and even "publishing doctoral research." But if undergraduate students (of any language background) had access to the explanations of terms and concepts like "theoretical framework," "methodology," and "writing process," they would be better prepared for graduate school than I was.

The entry for “plagiarism” surprised me, but I’m glad the authors included it. Plagiarism is a concept that differs to an incredible degree across cultures, and many international students have to come to terms with the concept quickly. But this is not the same as misunderstanding what a thesis statement really is; plagiarism can land students who are already feeling vulnerable in a new setting in very hot water. Having an entry for plagiarism was a stroke of brilliance because it normalizes the term among other academic terms.

My surprise at this entry made me realize the final group of readers I believe will find this book useful. I’ve already mentioned that instructors can use the reflection questions as assignment material, but instructors should also pay attention to the terms listed here. Some of these terms are so second-nature to academics who have been teaching and writing for years or decades that their inclusion in this text might be a necessary reminder that not everyone in a class is on the same page. Reexamining how we use terms and making sure to define them in class can help us become more considerate teachers and will improve the pedagogical experience for everyone.

A possible limitation of this book is simply its number of entries. While compiling a list of important terms for a course I taught over the summer, I referred to this book, and found that terms like “text” and “close reading” were missing. Clearly, not all subjects can be represented thoroughly, but it seems that the list skews toward the social sciences and sciences; more humanities representation would be welcome in future editions.

An A to W of Academic Literacy is written in an accessible, straight-forward tone with at-a-glance sections to encourage quick reference. It acknowledges the differences in and shifting nature of terminology across disciplines. Above all, it centers the experience of so-called non-traditional students and will thus be useful—and reassuring—to anyone. In addition, I think the unique nature of the co-authorship makes this volume a welcome addition to the genre.

References

- Government of Canada, S. C. (2021). *International students accounted for all of the growth in Postsecondary enrolments in 2018/2019*. The Daily. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/201125/dq201125e-eng.htm>.
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