

## **The art of academic writing: doctoral workshop goes interactive!**

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Given ARCOM's principal mission is to develop research capacity in the field of construction management, it is very encouraging to see in excess of 50 doctoral students participate in the first interactive ARCOM doctoral workshop on academic writing. Unlike the typical workshops where doctoral researchers present their work-in-progress and get feedback, the academic writing workshop held in the University of Manchester on Thursday 2 June 2011 was designed to get student participants to go through a mock article review process.

The workshop commenced with a series of presentations aimed at dispelling the myths and clarifying the process of submitting articles to peer-reviewed journals for publication. Professor Will Hughes from the University of Reading (Editor-in-Chief of *Construction Management and Economics*) explained what constitutes a 'Scientific' paper. In his presentation, Will explored the role of universities, the importance of setting the research within a theoretical framework, and the purpose of academic outputs. Will also provided some critical pointers as to what editors and reviewers search for when deciding whether submissions are publishable or not. These include the logic and coherence of arguments presented, the nature of data used, the design and execution of the research approach, and the formatting of papers.

Professor Christine Räisänen from Chalmers University then traced the origins of the present-day research article, which stemmed from the controversies over Isaac Newton's experiments on light. Christine talked about the importance of conforming to the customs of the discipline in what she termed as 'genres of writing'. Such customs are critical to note since it initiates the novice researcher into understanding the structure of communicating their research purpose, process and findings. Furthermore, such traditions help illustrate the development of the discipline or field. Christine offered the example from the chemistry discipline, where methodological debates have been resolved such that articles published in chemistry journals tend to contain shorter sections on research methods.

Other contributors included Professor Steve Brown (University of Exeter, Editor-in-Chief of the *International Journal of Operations and Production Management*) and Bland Tomkinson (University of Manchester, Associate Editor of *Higher Education Research and Development*). Following the formal presentations, a panel discussion took place with Christine, Will and Bland responding to questions from the audience. Topics discussed included the agenda of impacts of research and the distinction between conceptual review articles and empirical articles. Questions were also raised regarding the choice of journals to publish in the field of construction management, the importance of engaging with mainstream business management and social science disciplines, and the problem of authorship.

Participants then broke out into discussion groups after the formal presentations and lunch. The purpose of the break-out discussions was to get participants to share their experiences of reviewing a real article submitted by Dr. Pernilla Gluch and Professor Christine Räisänen to *Building Research and Information*. The discussions were very lively, and participants found much congruence between their reviews and the points raised by the actual reviewers. This certainly provided a sense of

confidence for many participants. As Ruan Ximing from Robert Gordon University remarked, "I really benefited a lot from this event. I am actually revising a paper for *Construction Management and Economics* and the mock review discussions have taught me how to respond to reviewers' comments properly." Emmanuel Aboagye-Nimo from Nottingham Trent University also thought that "the level of informality at the workshop has made it easy for new and maybe intimidated researchers such as myself to be able to ask questions and share their thoughts." Fred Sherratt from the University of Bolton summed it up neatly, as she "really liked the way it was a practical session" and that the food was so lovely. It is hoped that more interactive workshops will be planned for the future.