Introduction

Much of this book identifies recurring linguistic features of first-year (FY) and expert academic writing and considers why such analysis is rare and valuable: Chapters 1 and 2 contextualize the lack of linguistic attention in studies of FY writing; and Chapters 3, 4, and 6 discuss analysis of FY linguistic and rhetorical patterns that contrast expert writing and that are related to prompt cues.

This chapter aims to build on the ideas from the rest of the book and turn them into related, ready-to-use pedagogical applications. For example, the first two applications take the hedge, booster, and scope marker discussions from Chapter 4 and turn them into classroom activities focused on argumentative certainty and breadth. The second two applications are also based on corpus-based analysis of FY and expert writing, but they showcase two sets of features not shared elsewhere in the book. One is reformulation markers, or features that indicate a writer’s emphasis or restatement, and the second is transition markers, or features that help show a writer’s logic and organization.

In efforts to make the materials as usable as possible, the applications are written for a student audience. For this reason, the chapter also includes brief contextual details and definitions, and there are no concluding remarks in favor of providing explanations throughout the applications.

Per the discretion of teachers and students, the applications can be used with or without computer-aided tools and can be modified as needed. For example, an instructor may want to use her/his own writing assignments, but use the many student and expert passages in the chapter in order to scaffold students toward those writing assignments. More importantly than exactly how the applications are carried out is
that they foreground meaning-making patterns in academic writing and help build students’ awareness of those patterns.

What is not the goal of the chapter is to suggest that FY writers are “behind” or that all expert writing is the same. FY writers are at the beginning of navigating and contributing to the discourse of higher education—often markedly different from the discourse of secondary writing tasks—and this shift demands analysis, practice, and reflection. It is also not the goal to suggest that all expert academic writing is identical. As John Swales (1990) reminds us, academic texts are not unified by essential properties, but rather exist on a spectrum of family resemblances. Many of these resemblances, though, are recognizable: they play out in repeating features that characterize expert writing and often do not characterize FY writing. These patterns form the basis of the six applications below.

Parts of the chapter and using them in the classroom

The first four applications below focus on a discourse feature and a related writing concept—e.g. transition words and the related concept of textual cohesion. These applications can be the focus for a lesson or a unit in a writing course, a point to which I return shortly. Each one aims to elucidate an aspect of written academic discourse, by explaining a feature, connecting it to a writing concept or expectation, and providing multiple example uses of the feature so that students can see how academic writers use the feature across texts and disciplines. The specific components of these four discussions are as follows: first, an introduction to a discourse feature and related writing concept; second, relevant frequency patterns across FY and expert writing; third, key questions and answers about the feature; and fourth, examples of the feature in the context of several FY and expert passages. As noted above, the first two applications draw on features discussed in previous chapters, while the third and fourth applications include features from additional analyses using the FY corpus and the expert corpus.

One way in which an instructor might use these first four applications is as four lessons, spaced into the early weeks of a FY course and then reinforced throughout the remainder of a term. For instance, first, an instructor might present the definitional information as well as the overall FY and expert writing patterns; s/he might do so on a handout and/or in a lecture. (In my FY courses, I often introduce the feature and then ask students to guess how FY writers use it compared to experts, before sharing the use patterns.) Next, an instructor might distribute