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## Japanese University Teachers' Perceptions of L1 Academic Writing across Disciplines

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# Japanese University Teachers' Perceptions of L1 Academic Writing across Disciplines

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This study investigated Japanese university teachers' perceptions (N = 90) of L1 Japanese academic writing through the quantitative and qualitative analysis of questionnaire responses from two public universities, focusing on comparison between disciplines falling in the two broad areas of science and liberal arts. Clear parallels were found between the responses of the teachers and previous responses from university students. The results show that a substantial number of teachers are aware of the importance of academic writing for their students and the need to offer much more guidance in this area. Such awareness was notably stronger among those teaching in disciplines subsumed under liberal arts (i.e., humanities and social sciences), as opposed to sciences (computer science, engineering and physical sciences). In particular, some teachers advocated encouraging students to develop the ability to think logically and to participate actively as members of a community of scholars. The findings show that more efforts are needed to help students understand the importance of accurately citing ideas and words taken from outside sources, and using those borrowed ideas to support the students' own arguments.

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## I. Introduction

Teachers and researchers in English speaking environments are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of academic writing for the success of their students at the university level (e.g., Johns, 1997;

McKay, 1993). In conjunction with this awareness, substantial research on academic writing is being conducted in the English university context. In particular, current genre studies, focused mainly on English for Academic Purposes (EAP) define a genre as a set of "communicative events" that share the same communicative purposes within a given discourse

community and thus tend to exhibit similarities in content, style, structure, and intended audience (Swales, 1990: 58). This approach implies that teachers should be preparing their students to acquire the necessary "patterns of discourse" (habitual ways of communicating, particularly in academic writing) that they will be required to use as they progress through their studies (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995: 160). Similarly, current literacy theory has recognized the need to prepare inexperienced students to cope successfully with unfamiliar activities and discourse, particularly academic writing (Blanton, 1994; Johns, 1997).

While such studies suggest that academic writing is crucial to the success of university students entering the English academic community, similar efforts have also been made in Japan in order to help students deal effectively with the difficulties they may encounter at the university level. Many researchers and educators have attempted to clarify what kinds of academic skills are necessary at the university level. Sato (1996), for example, found that first year Japanese university students lacked the abilities to discuss ideas, to write papers and reports, and to formulate their own opinions, all of which were perceived by teachers to be important, particularly for work in liberal arts fields. Yamamura (2000) found the same tendency among Japanese university students, implying that the students did not have chances to develop such high-level oral and writing skills in high school.

At the same time, great interest in the development of Japanese academic writing has recently been generated by Kobayashi and Funabiki (1994, 1995, 1998), who view the ability to write academic papers as constituting one of the essential skills for university students to acquire. In contrast to the traditional view of learning as acquisition of knowledge through lectures (Hasegawa, 1995; Kariya, 1992), they advocate more active participation on the part of the students. Thus, in addition to acquiring knowledge in their specialized field, university students, particularly those majoring in the humanities, are being encouraged to acquire the basic skills of raising issues, perceiving connections, and making oral presentations, not to mention writing academic papers.

Along with awareness of the importance of these intellectual abilities, recognition of the necessity of

developing academic literacy appears to have gained acceptance inside and around Tokyo University, where Kobayashi and Funabiki teach (1998). Nevertheless, it is not known yet whether such perceptions are shared by teachers in other Japanese universities. One impetus for the present study was to investigate this question.

This study addresses the role of academic writing in the education of university students in Japan from the perspective of university teachers, focusing on their goals and their perceptions of students' writing problems. The study is based on the assumption that there is great variation in educational practices within each culture and that many such practices are changing rapidly in countries throughout the world, including Japan. The overall goal of the study was to improve our understanding of the current status and future perspectives for academic writing in higher education in Japan. The entire study consisted of five stages that examined Japanese students' and teachers' perceptions of L1 (their first language, i.e., Japanese) literacy in high schools and universities. In order to investigate these perceptions, five questionnaire and two interview studies were conducted from 1998 to 2001 (reported in detail in Kobayashi and Rinnert, 2001). The university teacher questionnaire, reported here, made up the last stage.

## II . Background: Summary of University Student Results

In order to contextualize the present study and provide some basis for interpretation of the teachers' responses, we will first summarize the main findings from the university student data. Student perceptions of first language (L1) literacy at the university level were elicited in two stages. The initial stage focused on Japanese undergraduate student perceptions (N = 336), with a small number of American students' responses (N = 76) to provide some perspective on the Japanese responses. The subsequent stage aimed to compare Japanese undergraduate (N = 269) and graduate student (N = 110) perceptions. (See Kobayashi and Rinnert, 2001 for detailed explanation of method and results.)

### 1) Comparison across cultures

The first questionnaire surveyed Japanese and American university undergraduate students' views of

their L1 academic writing, as well as comparing science (including physical sciences, engineering, computer science, and medicine) and liberal arts (humanities and social sciences) majors' perceptions of important features of writing in Japanese universities. A summary of the main findings is shown in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, the Japanese undergraduates reported writing fewer and shorter papers than the American students<sup>1</sup> and receiving relatively little formal writing instruction or feedback on their writing. Although the students across both countries and groups of majors agreed that the most important goals of academic writing were to show understanding and the ability to think analytically, the Japanese students rated originality and the evaluation of ideas significantly lower in importance than the American students did.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, regarding specific aspects of the writing, all the students agreed on the relative importance of logically organized, coherent, clear, and accurate writing, but the Japanese students judged all aspects except logical organization as significantly less important than the American students. At the same time, the Japanese students gave notably less importance than the Americans to correct citations of outside sources.

In most of these judgments, the Japanese liberal arts students' responses tended to be more similar than those of the science students to the American students' answers (probably at least in part because most of the American students were majoring in liberal arts). Finally,

significantly more of the Japanese students tended to find *ukeuri* (borrowing someone else's words or ideas without crediting the source) acceptable (5%) or conditionally acceptable (56%), as compared to very little acceptance of plagiarism (6% total, acceptable or conditionally acceptable) among the American students.

## 2) Comparison across academic levels and majors

At the second stage, in order to probe Japanese university students' perceptions in more depth, we compared student responses across two levels (graduate vs. undergraduate) and two groups of majors (science vs. liberal arts), focusing mainly on the academic writing students did for their major classes and their attitudes toward '*ukeuri*,' as defined above. Not surprisingly, the graduate students' reported significantly greater experience as compared to the undergraduate students in terms of both quantity and length of writing assignments. Table 2 summarizes the main findings.

As shown in Table 2, the graduate students reported a stronger preference than the undergraduates (and the liberal arts students, a stronger preference than the science students) for being evaluated on the basis of their performance in writing papers, as opposed to taking examinations, citing the opportunity to think deeply and express their own ideas about a topic when writing a paper.

Japanese undergraduate and graduate students in that study virtually all showed awareness of the basic

Table 1: University Students' Perceptions of L1 Academic Writing across Cultures

	JAPANESE (N=336*)	AMERICAN (N=76)
Amount of writing in major classes	Less than half of both majors required to write papers in a majority of classes	Over 75% of students required to write papers in a
Length of papers in major classes	Long papers (over 800 characters) for 48% of Science majors and 57% of Liberal Arts majors	Long papers (over 1000 words) for 76% of students
Formal writing instruction	Received by 47% of Science majors, 30% of	Received by 69% of students
Feedback from teachers	Never to sometimes for both majors	Sometimes to usually
Goals for writing	Showing understanding most important; showing originality and ability to evaluate ideas relatively unimportant	Showing understanding most important; showing originality and ability to evaluate ideas relatively important
Aspects of writing	Logical organization, clarity, overall coherence, accuracy of information most important; crediting borrowed ideas relatively unimportant (10 <sup>th</sup> rank)	Logical organization, clarity, overall coherence, accuracy of information most important; crediting borrowed ideas next most important (5 <sup>th</sup> rank)
Attitudes toward <i>ukeuri</i> /plagiarism	Conditionally acceptable for over half (56%)	Conditionally acceptable for very few (5%)

\*Science majors (N=184), Liberal Arts majors (N=152); a comparable comparison across majors was not made for the American students because almost all were liberal arts majors.

Table 2: Undergraduate and Graduate University Students' Perceptions of L1 Academic Writing across Majors

	MAJOR (S=126, A=252)	LEVEL (U=269, G=110)
Goals of reports	Developing students' own ideas more important for Liberal Arts than Science majors	Deepening students' understanding most important for both levels
Features of writing	Clarity, logical organization, convincing argumentation, accurate information most important overall for both majors	Evaluation of ideas, summarization, correct citation, academic terminology more important for graduates
Factor analysis of writing features	Writing skills (organization and content) most important for both majors (Factor 1)	Academic skills (summarize, evaluate, cite sources) more important for graduates (Factor 2)
Evaluation preferences	More Liberal Arts than Science majors prefer papers to exams for grading	More graduates than undergraduates prefer papers to exams
Instruction in correct citation	More Liberal Arts than Science majors say more instruction needed	Both groups agree more instruction needed
Thesis writing	More Liberal Arts than Science majors found thesis writing difficult or very difficult; most important features: logical organization, clarity, convincing argumentation	Both groups found thesis writing difficult or very difficult; originality more important for graduates than undergraduates
Possible reasons <i>ukeuri</i> unavoidable	Survival strategies (problems with time, topic, knowledge, references; need credit; improve grade/wording/persuasiveness) most common; agree with ideas or same ideas as author, second most common	Same perceptions among undergraduates and graduates

S: Science majors; A: Liberal Arts majors; U: Undergraduates; G: Graduates

writing skills needed for academic L1 writing (identified as Factor 1), such as logical organization and clarity of expression. However, the graduates showed more recognition of the importance of a second category of academic skills related to writing (Factor 2), which included the ability to summarize, evaluate, and correctly cite ideas from outside reading.

Both undergraduate and graduate students reported difficulties in writing their theses, and both groups agreed that more instruction in correct citation was necessary. However, there appeared to be great variation in writing requirements and expectations across majors. For example, science majors reported writing fewer long papers than liberal arts majors, and fewer science majors preferred writing a paper to taking an exam for their class evaluation (grade). On the other hand, as compared to liberal arts majors, fewer science majors reported difficulty or great difficulty in writing their graduation or Masters thesis, although three-quarters of the science majors did report at least some difficulty.

According to the interview data, great variation could be seen, even within the same broad major area (science or liberal arts), depending on the specific fields and teachers. For example, several students reported that anthropology and literature professors showed much greater concern than economics professors in the same

faculty for such academic writing skills as correct citation and critical thinking (evaluation of ideas students have read).

### III. This Study: The University Teacher Stage

In an attempt to confirm and augment our understanding of the university student responses, we elicited university teachers' perceptions in the last stage of the study. As with the students, we compared the responses of teachers specializing in science vs. liberal arts, focusing on important features of writing at the undergraduate level. In this phase of the study, we focused on the following five research questions:

- (1) What do teachers perceive to be the goals of Japanese L1 reports they assign in their major classes and how do they support these goals in practice?
- (2) What do teachers perceive to be the most important abilities for their students to acquire through university education?
- (3) What do teachers perceive to be the ultimate goals of L1 academic writing?
- (4) What do teachers perceive to be students' problems with Japanese writing?
- (5) What are teachers' attitudes toward correct citation?

## IV. Method

### 1. Questionnaire

The construction of the questionnaire basically followed the methodology recommended by psychometricians (cf. Converse & Presser, 1991) for questionnaire design. Preliminary questionnaire items were constructed on the basis of the findings from the university student questionnaires and interviews. After refinement of the wording based on pre-testing with several graduate students, the questionnaire was piloted with two teachers, who suggested further areas for improvement, mainly involving minor stylistic changes to improve consistency and clarity. The final questionnaire (shown in the Appendix) consisted of 8 questions, containing 36 separate items. In addition to background information about the teachers, such as gender, age, and numbers of years of teaching, the questions elicited teachers' perceptions of the purpose of the reports they assigned, the amount of writing instruction and feedback they gave, and the amount of attention they paid to correct citation of outside sources. Teachers were also asked about the important features of the writing they assigned and about their attitudes and practices in relation to correct citation, based on 4-point Likert scales. Finally they were asked two open-ended questions to elicit their opinions about the sources of students' writing difficulties and the ultimate goals of students' academic writing experience in the university.

### 2. Participants

The data were collected during February and March, 2001. The questionnaires were distributed to all full-time teachers in three faculties (one science, one liberal arts and one integrated arts and sciences) at the two universities where the researchers teach.<sup>3</sup> Approximately 360 questionnaires were distributed and 90 were returned to the researchers, a return rate of 25%, which can be considered reasonable, given the entirely voluntary nature of the participation and the timing, during the break from teaching classes, when faculty members tend to travel overseas. Although male participants (85%) outnumbered female participants (15%), the representation from the science (48%) and liberal arts (52%) fields was well balanced. The science fields

represented included various sub-fields of computer science and engineering, as well as physical sciences such as biology and physics, whereas liberal arts encompassed a broad range of disciplines across the humanities and social sciences (anthropology, art history, economics, history, linguistics, literature, political science). While all age groups were represented, most participants were in their 30s (22%), 40s (35%), and 50s (22%). The average length of teaching experience was 14.6 years (standard deviation: 11.5).

### 3. Analysis

The responses to the scaled items on the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively. This quantitative analysis included descriptive statistics and factor analysis of the specific abilities for students to acquire to see how the 17 abilities would cluster. In addition, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and simple effects analysis were conducted to compare responses by teachers from the two broad areas of specialization (science vs. liberal arts) for selected questions, as explained in the Results section. The open-ended questions were analyzed mainly qualitatively.

## V. Results

### 1. Goals and Practices Concerning Reports

In order to probe the teachers' perceptions of the writing assignments they gave, we asked them to rate, in terms of their applicability, six statements about the written reports they assigned (Q 3). Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations (SDs) for these ratings by field of specialization of the teachers responding (science vs. liberal arts): 1 = not at all applicable, 2 = not very applicable, 3 = somewhat applicable, 4 = very applicable. It is important to note that for the purpose of reporting the results here and facilitating the comparison with the student responses, all of the numbers have been reversed from the original questionnaire shown in the Appendix. For example, in the questionnaire, 1 = very applicable, and 4 = not at all applicable, whereas here the higher number (4) indicates very applicable.

As shown in Table 3, the two groups of teachers differed significantly in their perceptions of the purpose of the written reports they assigned. First, the purpose of showing comprehension of lectures and textbook

**Table 3: Cross-field Comparison of Teachers' Judgments of Applicability of Statements about their Own Writing Assignments (Q 3)**

Statement	Science Teachers (N = 43) Mean (SD)	Liberal Arts Teachers (N = 47) (SD)
(1) Purpose of report is to show comprehension of lecture, textbook	3.32 (0.61)*	3.00 (0.70)
(2) Purpose of report is to state own opinions, ideas based on collected data	3.00 (0.78)	3.51 (0.67)**
(3) I teach how to write reports (e.g. organization) before students write	2.49 (0.81)	3.05 (0.75)**
(4) I try to give feedback on students' papers	2.69 (0.84)	2.79 (0.89)
(5) I always return students' papers	2.43 (1.04)	2.65 (1.04)
(6) When I read students' papers, I pay attention to use of correct citation	2.80 (0.79)	3.40 (0.70)**

1 = not at all applicable, 4 = very applicable  
\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

readings was rated higher by science (S: 3.32) than liberal arts (A: 3.00) teachers ( $F = 4.978$ ,  $p < .05$ ).<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the purpose of stating the students' own opinions and ideas based on collected data, was rated higher by liberal arts (3.51) than science (3.00) teachers ( $F = 10.892$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

More liberal arts (3.05) than science (2.49) teachers reported teaching students how to write (e.g., organization) before they wrote their papers ( $F = 10.774$ ,  $p < .01$ ). However, there was no difference between the disciplines in terms of the teachers' somewhat limited attempts to give feedback on student papers (S = 2.69; A = 2.79) or always return student papers (S = 2.43; A = 2.65). Finally, the amount of attention reportedly paid to the use of correct citation was significantly higher for the liberal arts (3.40) than the science (2.80) teachers ( $F = 12.486$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

## 2. Important Abilities for Students to Acquire

The teachers were asked (Q 5) to evaluate the importance of 17 academic literacy related abilities that their students might be expected to acquire as part of their university education. Table 4 presents the overall means and SDs of their judgments (1 = not at all important, 2 = not very important, 3 = somewhat important, 4 = very important, again reversed from the original judgments), in descending order of rated importance.

Apart from the 4-point Likert scale evaluation, the teachers were also asked in a separate question (Q 6) to choose, from among the 17 given in Table 4, the top 4 most important abilities for students when writing their graduation thesis. The results of this evaluation of graduation thesis writing skills partially matched those of the Likert-scale rating of skills for report writing, in that the top 5 thesis-writing abilities selected were identical to the abilities receiving the 5 highest mean scores for report writing in Table 4. Thus, for thesis writing, the most important ability was logical organization, selected by 61% of the participants; the second most important was clear self-expression (53%); the following two, which tied for third place, were ability to read and write Japanese and support for ideas (both at 33%), and the ability to analyze data came next (at 24%).

However, some of the other abilities showed rather different rankings in this second evaluation of importance focussing on the graduation thesis. Most notably, the ability to make a research plan (chosen by 23% of the teachers as being among the 4 most important) jumped from 11<sup>th</sup> place in Table 4 to 6<sup>th</sup> place in the ranking for thesis writing. Similarly, knowledge of how to carry out experiments (selected by 19%) jumped from 17<sup>th</sup> place in Table 4 to 8<sup>th</sup> place in the current ranking, and knowledge of a foreign language (chosen by 17%) rose from 16<sup>th</sup> place rating to 10<sup>th</sup> place. These two latter changes could be assumed to reflect cross-field

Table 4: Teachers' Judgments of Importance of Academic Abilities\* (Q 5)

	Mean	(SD)
1. Clear self-expression (3)	3.87	(0.38)
2. Ability to organize ideas logically (9)	3.85	(0.36)
3. Ability to read and write Japanese (17)	3.71	(0.53)
4. Support for ideas (10)	3.67	(0.52)
5. Ability to analyze data (15)	3.45	(0.72)
6. Evaluation of ideas or established assertions (1)	3.39	(0.67)
7. Correct citation (7)	3.36	(0.66)
8. Original thinking (2)	3.36	(0.71)
9. Accurate summarization/paraphrase of ideas in own words (5)	3.35	(0.73)
10. Connection of knowledge from sources with topic (6)	3.35	(0.73)
11. Formulation of research design/plan (12)	3.27	(0.72)
12. Use of appropriate academic terminology (4)	3.25	(0.68)
13. Ability to present academic argumentation (14)	3.19	(0.75)
14. Knowledge of how to collect relevant literature (11)	3.18	(0.64)
15. Knowledge of how to write papers in specialized field (8)	3.01	(0.63)
16. Ability to read and write foreign language (16)	3.00	(0.83)
17. Knowledge of how to carry out experiments (13)	2.93	(1.11)

\*Listed in descending order (ranking) of reported importance; original item number is indicated in parentheses after each one

differences in the importance of these two abilities. At the same time, the relatively highly ranked abilities of evaluating ideas and original thinking dropped from 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> ranking in Table 4, to 12<sup>th</sup> (14%) and 11<sup>th</sup> (17%), respectively, in terms of the number of teachers considering them among the most important abilities for thesis writing.

In order to compare the Table 4 responses statistically across the two fields (science vs. liberal arts), the 17 items were first subjected to a Principal Factor

Analysis with Varimax rotation. On the basis of the analysis, it was determined that one item (14: Ability to present academic argumentation) should be eliminated from the analysis, because it had equal loadings on more than one factor (that is, it could not be identified with any single factor, the way the other items could). Thus, the remaining 16 abilities were once again analyzed using the same procedure, yielding 5 factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1, which together accounted for 64.33% of the variance, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Factor Analysis of Academic Abilities: Highest Loadings \*(Q 5: item numbers indicated in parentheses after each)

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Logical organization (9)	0.711				
Japanese language (17)	0.684				
Support for ideas (10)	0.675				
Clear self-expression (3)	0.666				
Academic terminology (4)	0.578				
Original thinking (2)		0.877			
Evaluation of ideas (1)		0.785			
Carrying out experiments (13)			0.838		
Data analysis (15)			0.764		
Literature collection (11)				0.761	
Research planning (12)				0.704	
Foreign language (16)				0.621	
Writing for specialized field (8)				0.457	
Summarizing/paraphrasing (5)					0.805
Connection of source+topic (6)					0.701
Correct citation (7)					0.518
% of total variance explained by each factor	15.95	10.02	11.04	14.76	12.56

\*For ease of presentation, only loadings greater than 0.45 have been included in this table; one item (number 14) was eliminated from the final analysis because it had loaded equally on two factors in preliminary analyses



The five factors can be characterized as follows. Factor 1 (Writing Skills) involves organizing ideas logically, reading and writing Japanese, supporting ideas, expressing one's self clearly, and using appropriate academic expression. Factor 2 (Critical Thinking) includes thinking originally and evaluating ideas. Factor 3 (Experimental Research) consists of the abilities to carry out experiments and analyze data. Factor 4 (Research Paper/Thesis) involves collecting relevant literature, formulating a research plan, reading and writing a foreign language, and knowing how to write papers in one's specialized field. Factor 5 (Use of Sources) consists of summarizing/paraphrasing ideas, connecting sources with the topic of the thesis, and citing sources correctly.

For the purpose of comparing teachers' responses across fields, the scores for the items under each factor were averaged, and the resulting means were subjected to a 2 (science vs. liberal arts) by 5 (factors) MANOVA, and post-hoc tests of effects. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 6.

As shown in Table 6, there were no differences between the disciplinary groups in giving the Writing Skills factor the greatest importance. However, as could be expected, the science teachers (S: 3.55) significantly outscored the liberal arts teachers (A: 2.71) in terms of the importance of the Experimental Research factor. In contrast, the liberal arts faculty significantly outscored the science faculty in their ratings of importance of the other three factors: Critical Thinking (S: 3.21, A: 3.51), Research Paper (S: 3.03, A: 3.21), and Use of Sources (S: 3.13, A: 3.55).

### 3. Goals of Academic Writing Experience

One open-ended question on the questionnaire (Q 8) asked teachers to share their thoughts on the abilities

their students gained by engaging in academic writing and the ultimate goals of the students' university writing experiences. More than 70% (64) of the teachers responded to this question, some of them at great length. Qualitative analysis of the comments revealed five main categories of benefits associated with academic writing at the university: (1) clear, logical expression; (2) formulation of students' own ideas; (3) enhanced understanding; (4) logical thinking; and (5) other benefits. Figure 1 represents the proportions of teachers citing each of these categories (out of the total 64 teachers who responded to this question). The total is greater than 100% because some of the teachers mentioned more than one category of concern.

Following is an explanation of these categories of comments, with examples (the percentage of teachers mentioning each category is indicated in parentheses).

#### 1) Clear, logical expression (77%)

Perhaps not surprisingly, the major goal cited for university writing was the development of an ability to express ideas, explaining and arranging them logically, clearly, accurately, persuasively, briefly, and/or objectively. For example, many teachers mentioned the importance of learning to explain ideas in a logical and understandable way. One teacher saw the final goal as being to clearly state an opinion and "master the method to persuade other people."<sup>5</sup> Another cited the ability to clearly explain facts or events in objective terms to a third person. Several teachers emphasized the function of self-expression, specifically mentioning that writing is a way to express or present oneself clearly.

#### 2) Formulation of students' own ideas (50%)

Closely related to and overlapping with the goal of expression, especially self-expression, the second most

Table 6: Cross-field Comparison of Teachers' Mean Factor Scores

	Science (N = 43) Mean (SD)	Liberal Arts (N = 47) Mean (SD)	p value
Factor 1 (Writing Skills)	3.67 (0.40)	3.67 (0.29)	.589 ns.
Factor 2 (Critical Thinking)	3.21 (0.60)	3.51 (0.57)	.010*
Factor 3 (Experimental Research)	3.55 (0.62)	2.71 (0.72)	.000**
Factor 4 ((Research Paper/Thesis)	3.03 (0.51)	3.21 (0.45)	.028*
Factor 5 (Use of Sources)	3.13 (0.61)	3.55 (0.43)	.003**

1 = not at all important, 4 = very important

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , ns = non-significant

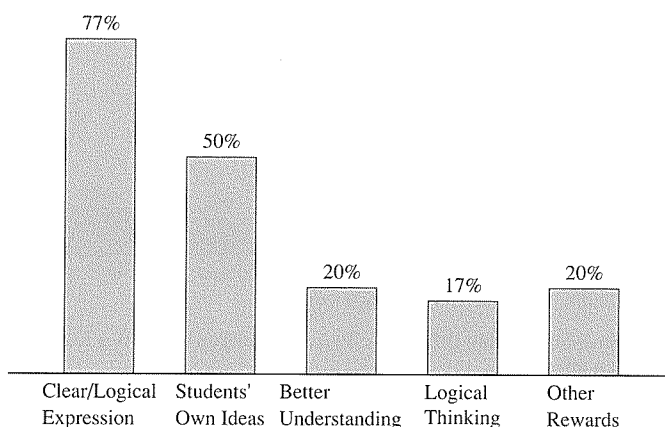


Figure 1: Goals of Academic Writing Experience: Percentage of Teachers Citing Each Goal (N = 64)

frequently cited aim of academic writing was to formulate one's own thoughts or opinions. Half of the respondents specifically referred to the importance of having one's own opinion, including the ability to clarify one's thoughts and to distinguish between one's own opinion and that of others. For example, one teacher talked about the importance of clarifying one's "own position in the [academic] discourse." Another mentioned the need to "disseminate one's own idea," adding that "if one has no ideas, there is no need to write." One teacher described writing as "a process to summarize others' research and to explain and verify one's own thoughts" and another referred to it as a chance "to establish one's identity."

### 3) Enhanced understanding (20%)

Responses in the third category of goals specifically referred to the importance of understanding. This included understanding of what students read and of the background of their own research. Several teachers mentioned that writing, particularly thesis writing, could aid students' understanding of arguments in the relevant academic discourse or enhance their appreciation of the "diversity and complexity of the issues."

### 4) Logical thinking (17%)

The fourth category can be seen as closely related to the preceding one, but comments in this category specifically emphasized the way of thinking rather than understanding. Most of the comments in this category talked about the development of the ability to think

logically. Besides "logical thinking," teachers' comments in this category referred to development of "coherent thinking" or a "logical critical viewpoint." One teacher referred to acquiring "the way of thinking in the specialized field (as one of the ways of thinking)."

### 5) Other Benefits (20%)

Overlapping somewhat with the above categories, a number of comments explicitly mentioned practical or personal benefits to students beyond their university life. Several teachers mentioned the necessity of knowing how to write, in companies or daily life, after leaving the university. Others focused on less tangible effects, including "pleasure," "self-awareness," and "find[ing] one's position in society."

## 4. Student Difficulties with Academic Writing

In response to the other open-ended question (Q 4) eliciting teachers' perceptions of students' writing difficulties, five main areas of concern emerged among the 60 teachers who answered the question. These were (1) lack of writing skills, (2) problems with logical thinking, (3) lack of background knowledge, (4) difficulties finding suitable references, and (5) lack of time or commitment on the part of students.<sup>6</sup> Figure 2 presents the proportion of teachers citing each of these categories (out of the total 60 teachers who responded to this question). Each of the five areas of concern is explained and illustrated below (with the percentage of teachers mentioning each indicated in parentheses).

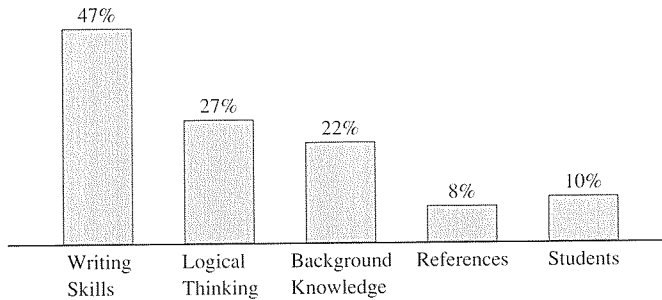


Figure 2: Students' Writing Difficulties: Percentage of Teachers Citing Each Problem (N = 60)

### 1) Lack of writing skills (47%)

As perceived by the teachers, the biggest difficulty students have with their academic writing concerns lack of basic writing skills at all levels, from the overall structure of the report down to formulation of sentences and words. Almost half of the teachers who responded specifically mentioned students' lack of experience or training in writing skills, for example saying that when "a teacher asks the students to write reports, the students are given little feedback, and the students' writing skill is not developed." Seven teachers mentioned problems with the structuring of a report or arguments; for example, "It seems difficult for students to develop an argument step by step." Several teachers mentioned students' problems writing logical sentences, one cited "difficulties to write formal and polite sentences," and another pointed out the difficulty of writing sentences that can be understood by other people. Another complained, "They don't know the format of a report; then if they are asked to rewrite their reports, they cannot find any errors."

### 2) Problems with logical thinking (27%)

The second most frequently cited category of writing problems was related to logical thinking. These included difficulties finding, developing, or explaining students' own ideas, as well as problems judging or interpreting data. Two teachers specifically mentioned problems with logical thinking, one lamented students' inability to read critically, and another referred to difficulty in distinguishing one's own ideas from those of others. According to one teacher, the students "don't think deeply to create their own idea, and at the same time they feel fear even if they have such original findings."<sup>7</sup>

### 3) Lack of background knowledge of the field of study (22%)

The third most frequently identified problem concerned limitations in background knowledge, including students' lack of knowledge of how to understand the meaning of what they read and how to collect and analyze data (which may overlap somewhat with the preceding category of logical thinking). For example, one teacher said students "cannot understand deeply the background of the contents of the lecture and experiments" and another cited students' lack of knowledge of the correct meaning of technical terms.

### 4) Difficulties finding suitable references (8%)

A fourth category of reported difficulties involved problems with references. Such difficulties included technical problems, such as "the library has few books concerning their study" and "[there are cases] when there is no suitable reference book (in the library or a professor's office)." Other comments in this category referred to students' lack of knowledge about how to collect bibliography or survey references.

### 5) Lack of time or student commitment (10%)

The final category of comments focused on lack of time and perceived lack of student commitment. Several teachers mentioned time constraints for students to write or for teachers to read their reports. Two others said they felt "students seem to be too busy to study," and one other complained that "sometimes [students] don't listen to the main points of the lecture earnestly."

## 5. Citation of outside sources

Following up on the results of the university

students' perceptions of the specific problem of *ukeuri* (borrowing ideas or words from outside sources without giving credit), we asked the teachers to rate their agreement with five opinion statements regarding the use of outside sources (Q 7). The means and SDs for the five statements (again reversed from the original scale, so that 4 = strongly agree) are presented in Table 7.

As is clear in the table, both groups of teachers rejected the notion that students know how to give correct citation (S: 2.10, A: 1.91) and clearly agreed that students need more instruction in correct citation, although the liberal arts teachers' level of agreement (3.75) with the need for instruction was significantly higher than that of the science teachers (3.41). Both groups of teachers basically agreed that teachers should not accept student papers that contain plagiarized ideas (S: 3.28, A: 3.39). They also both expressed mild agreement with the notion that students believe they do not need to give citations for ideas presented in lectures or their textbook (S: 2.82, A: 2.75) or for ideas they agree with (S: 2.34, A: 2.79), the liberal arts teachers agreeing significantly more with the latter statement than the science teachers. In the comments regarding writing problems (reported in the preceding section), it should be noted that one teacher went so far as to say that many students copy other students' reports and only 20% or so

of the reports in a class are original, which seems to represent a rather pessimistic view of the current situation regarding *ukeuri*.

## 6 . Discussion

The teachers who participated in this study provided insightful perspectives on the role of academic writing at the university level in Japan. In addition to clarifying and confirming many of the students' views, their input added more depth to our understanding of the present situation and possible future directions for academic writing in Japan.

In many ways, the teachers' perceptions supported those of the students. First, the teachers' responses basically paralleled those of the students regarding the purpose of writing assignments. That is, both students and teachers recognized the goals of writing assignments to include showing understanding of ideas in the field, as well as expressing students' own opinions, based on what they have read. In both cases, the quantitative data showed a division across fields, with the science students and teachers reporting relatively more emphasis on showing understanding, and those in the liberal arts, on expressing opinions.

Next, the teachers' quantitative and qualitative results confirmed the relative lack of feedback on

Table 7: Teachers' Attitudes toward Citation of Outside Sources by Field (Q 7)

Statement	Science Teachers (N = 43) Mean (SD)	Liberal Arts Teachers (N = 47) Mean (SD)
(1) Most students know how to give correct citation	2.10 (0.64)	1.91 (0.68)
(2) Students think if they agree with someone else's idea there's no need to show source	2.34 (0.78)	2.79 (0.67)**
(3) Students think once ideas are introduced in lectures or textbook, no need to show source	2.82 (0.65)	2.75 (0.67)
(4) Teachers should reject students' reports if students use someone else's idea without citation	3.28 (0.83)	3.39 (0.75)
(5) Students need more instruction in correct citation	3.41 (0.60)	3.75 (0.44)**

1 = not at all applicable, 2 = not very applicable, 3 = somewhat applicable, 4 = very applicable

\*\* $p < .01$

students' writing and paucity of instruction on Japanese academic writing at the university undergraduate level, at least before students write the graduation thesis. In relation to this lack, both students and teachers, particularly those in the liberal arts, explicitly advocated more instruction in correct citation of outside sources.

Third, teachers' ratings of the importance of specific writing-related abilities basically matched those of the students. That is, for the teachers and all groups of students, the most important qualities of writing were clear expression, logical organization, and support for ideas. These abilities were all included under Factor 1 (Writing Skills) for both the students and teachers. At the same time, the teachers' ratings reflected those of the graduate students and the liberal arts majors reported earlier. In particular, the liberal arts teachers gave relatively higher importance than the science teachers to evaluation of ideas or assertions, connecting knowledge from sources with the topic of a paper, and using correct citation. These abilities fell under Factor 2 (Academic Skills) for the students, and Factor 2 (Critical Thinking) and Factor 5 (Use of Sources) for the teachers.

On the other hand, some of the teachers' perceptions went beyond those of the students. Specifically, their responses led to a more complex picture of academic writing skills, involving five factors, rather than two. For example, the emergence of "Research Paper/Thesis" (Factor 4) reflects the partial difference in emphasis between report writing skills and thesis writing skills that were revealed in other results of the quantitative analysis (e.g., the relatively greater importance for thesis writing of such factors as the ability to make a research plan). In addition, the identification of "Experimental Research" (Factor 3) makes it easier to clarify some of the interdisciplinary differences in the nature and purpose of academic writing for the sciences vs. the liberal arts, although the ability to perform "data analysis" is clearly important for both.

Several of the categories that emerged from the qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses supported the results of the quantitative factor analysis. In particular, the "Critical Thinking" factor corresponds to two of the most important categories of goals of academic writing identified by teachers, "formulation/expression of students' own ideas" and "logical thinking." This factor also relates directly to one of the major

student writing problems pointed out by teachers, "problems with logical thinking." These findings indicate that teachers perceive a strong relation between logical thinking and academic writing. Such findings also imply that they believe the ability to think logically both underlies academic writing and can be developed through it.

Similarly, the "Use of Sources" factor relates to the category of student writing difficulties labeled "difficulties finding suitable references" and additional specific comments that mentioned the need to train students to make effective use of outside sources and cite them correctly. Clearly, these teachers perceive as crucial students' ability to read and understand outside sources and incorporate them into their writing. Combined with the quantitative findings suggesting that students lack confidence in their knowledge of citation conventions, we can conclude that instruction in citation should be given a high priority within students' university education.

In addition, the "Research Paper/Thesis" factor is supported by teachers' additional comments (see the following section) explaining the differences in the ways they treat thesis and report writing. On the basis of these results, we can conclude that the process of writing a graduation thesis is highly valued by at least some of the university teachers in this study. As they pointed out, working closely with a small group of students on their own research makes it possible to develop their academic writing far beyond what can be achieved with larger groups in regular classes.

All these results suggest that the Japanese teachers in this study are not socializing students to reproduce "transmitted knowledge" or to consider "only one 'correct' point of view," which are supposed to be typical characteristics of non-Western educational systems (Cortazzi, 1990: 62). Rather, these teachers appear to be encouraging "critical evaluation" of competing theories, development of clear argumentation, and acknowledgement of outside sources, which are said to be typical of Western educational approaches (Cortazzi, 1990: 61). It is beyond the scope of this study to determine whether the current approach of these teachers represents a new trend or an extension of an older tradition, but either way it is clear that some descriptions of the Japanese university education system are either inaccurate or

outdated. For example, these teachers are hardly encouraging learning strategies of memorization or imitation of models (Carson, 1992) or stressing the mastery of vast quantities of information over "intellectual growth" (Dryden, 1999: 78). Therefore, we can conclude that at least some teachers outside of Tokyo University are taking seriously the need to help their students develop as academic writers.

## 7. Pedagogical Implications

A number of the teachers' comments (from Q 4 and Q 8), not categorized above, focused on practical problems in teaching writing at the university level and offered deeper insights into the writing processes and/or specific suggestions for what should be taught and how. These opinions, combined with the findings discussed above, suggest several possible practical guidelines for improving the quality of undergraduate students' academic writing, as detailed below.

### 1) Teaching citation conventions

As clearly seen in the results discussed above, both students and teachers agreed that more effort needs to be made to teach students how to cite borrowed ideas and words appropriately. In their additional comments, several teachers elaborated on the necessity of teaching students to voice their own ideas, and expand on and support their assertions with evidence, "using borrowed material properly, according to the style of a major professional organization (*gakka*) or journal in the student's field."

As implied by this view, the related skills of accurately summarizing, paraphrasing, quoting, and citing sources should be taught together, and the ability to incorporate information from a variety of sources can enhance the quality of students' writing. At the same time, clear guidelines regarding the need to avoid plagiarism and specific techniques for citing sources in the text of the paper and in a reference list at the end of the paper need to be developed.

### 2) Providing careful graduation thesis writing guidance

Several teachers explicitly distinguished between report writing, which they perceived as less valuable, and thesis writing, which they saw as more valuable. For

example, one science teacher pointed out the problems of reports, which are seldom considered very important and are often too numerous to read carefully (e.g., when there are 100 reports in a class). In contrast, according to this teacher, the advantages of working with a small group of students on their graduation theses include the ability to "support students totally on the following five points: the search, the plan, the experiment, the writing presentation, and the verbal presentation." Another teacher characterized the value of the thesis writing process as not necessarily to express originality, but through searching for references, and then by reading, understanding, analyzing and evaluating them to "cultivate the ability to express their own thoughts".

Such characterizations of the thesis writing experience highlight the necessity of providing specific guidance to students in small groups or one-to-one about how to go about conducting research and the detailed, time-consuming process of writing a thesis. From everything we have seen, it is unrealistic to assume that current fourth year undergraduate students have already acquired these skills. Thus, careful attention to the whole process is essential.

### 3) Cooperating across the curriculum

A number of teachers pointed out the necessity of providing more writing instruction across the curriculum. For example, one teacher advocated training students in academic writing during their first year of university study, and another cited the need to provide students with sufficient support for their academic writing because writing formal academic papers cannot be achieved without effort. This same teacher advocated "an organized curriculum to teach students how to write such reports" on both macro and micro levels: organization, persuasive techniques, coherence, appropriate sentence length, use of conjunctions and punctuation, and proofreading skills.

These observations and the overall findings of this study indicate the need both for cooperation across disciplines to establish guidelines and for curriculum innovations to address such skills as expressing ideas clearly, forming logical arguments, supporting points with evidence, citing outside sources appropriately, and avoiding plagiarism. Ideally, it should be possible to develop a comprehensive approach to teaching academic

literacy from the first year of university. Nevertheless, the rather large differences in some perceptions between the broad fields of science and liberal arts in this study suggest that it may be preferable to stay inside each of these two broad categories, rather than attempting to combine them under a single overall approach.

#### 4) Initiating students as members of an academic community

Finally, a direct concern for initiating students as members of an academic community is seen in two of the teachers' comments. One teacher pointed out the need to go beyond mere technical skills to connect with a continuously evolving body of knowledge and community of scholars "to recognize that the knowledge that we feel springs out naturally is the product of continuous efforts by many people." The other focused on the discipline-specific knowledge that students gain as they acquire academic literacy by writing reports and a thesis, "entering a community of scholars" and becoming "familiar with that community and the community's practices before voicing their own ideas."

These comments clearly echo the current perspectives of international researchers in genre and literacy theory cited in the Introduction (e.g., Blanton, 1994; Johns, 1997; Swales, 1990) and indicate that at least a few Japanese university teachers recognize a need for socializing students within a new discourse community. The implications of taking such an approach could include re-formulating the teacher-student relationship to make it more like a mentoring relationship than the traditional view of teacher as giver and student as receiver of knowledge. In fact, the above discussion of graduation thesis guidance could be taken as evidence that this approach to learning has already been incorporated in the practices of many of the thesis advisors who participated in this study.

## VII. Conclusion

This study investigated Japanese university teachers' perceptions of academic writing through the analysis of questionnaire responses from teachers at two public universities. Clear parallels were found between the responses of the teachers and previous responses from university students. Moreover, the teachers provided

perspectives on the future of writing instruction in university education in Japan. The results of this study show that a substantial number of teachers at the two public universities where the questionnaire was administered are aware of the importance of academic writing for their students. At the same time, at least some of them appear to advocate encouraging students to develop the ability to think logically and to participate actively as members of a community of scholars.

Although the sample size for the study was sufficiently large for statistical analysis, one limitation of the study was the elicitation of responses through convenience sampling, rather than stratified random sampling. The university teachers were drawn from only two, fairly competitive, public schools, and thus they cannot be considered in any sense representative of students or teachers around Japan. Another potential weakness of the study concerns the lack of follow-up interviews to confirm the findings. Ideally, selected members of the group who responded to the questionnaires should be interviewed about their responses, but to date this has not been accomplished due to the anonymity of the respondents and time constraints.

The quantitative results and the teachers' extensive comments regarding students' writing difficulties and goals for academic writing point the way to improvement of the current situation. In particular, sharing these teachers' insights with the broader community of university teachers in Japan may lead to curricular innovations. These could include systematic training in report writing and critical thinking (e.g., evaluation of assertions and formulation of one's own ideas based on what is read) as part of required freshman seminars or study skills classes. Improvements could also involve more emphasis on the part of teachers in various disciplines across the curriculum to improve their students' writing skills by instructing them in the basic structures required for particular kinds of reports and providing more feedback to their students on their writing.

At the same time, more efforts are clearly needed to help students understand the importance of carefully citing ideas and words taken from outside sources, and using those borrowed ideas to support the students' own argument. Teachers may need to explain the potentially serious nature of *ukeuri* in Japanese thesis writing, as

well as plagiarism in English writing. If students can learn how to use outside sources to support their arguments and how to credit those sources properly, they will be able to gain the benefits of using the well-chosen words and ideas of experts, without the risks of serious consequences that could result from improper use of such sources.

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### NOTES

- 1 It should be noted that 800 characters in Japanese (two standard pages) can be considered substantially shorter than 1,000 words in English (3 to 4 pages, depending on the font type and size). If the lengths had been equivalent, the differences between the two groups' experiences might have been even larger.
- 2 The measures of statistical significance for the university student stages of the study were based on Mann-Whitney U-tests.
- 3 The specific faculties were the Faculty of Information Sciences (science) and the Faculty of International Studies (liberal arts) at Hiroshima City University and the Faculty of Integrated Arts and Sciences (comprising both science and liberal arts) at Hiroshima University.
- 4 This and all statistical significance levels for this stage of the study are based on post-MANOVA tests of effects (univariate F-tests).
- 5 All quoted comments are translations of the original Japanese.
- 6 In addition, two respondents specifically mentioned teachers' own limitations. One mentioned difficulties many teachers have in deciding on a suitable topic for writing assignments, and the other cited teachers' occasional inability to give effective instruction, particularly regarding how to use Internet resources.
- 7 It would be interesting to find out what was meant by this reference to fear on the part of students. However, because the responses were purposely kept anonymous in order to encourage respondents to be entirely open, it was not possible to follow up on this comment and explore its meaning.

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## APPENDIX

### Original 4-Page Japanese Questionnaire

#### 「教員からみた学部生のレポート・卒論に対する意識調査」 へのご協力をお願い

このたび、「高等教育におけるアカデミック・ライティングの役割」に関する調査の一環として、調査票を配付させていただきました。この調査の目的は、21世紀の国際化時代を迎え、論文作成能力の育成が重要であるという観点から、学部生のレポート・卒論について先生方のお考えやご意見をお伺いし、大学教育における「ライティング」の現状と展望を明らかにしようとするものです。

今回の調査は、高等教育でのアカデミック・リテラシー教育に関する日米比較研究への第一歩として考えております。このアンケートでは、特に、専門教育科目のレポート、卒業論文、引用の仕方の3項目についてお尋ねしています。

学年末でご多忙のところ大変恐縮ですが、この調査の趣旨をご理解のうえ、3月30日（金曜日）までにご回答いただければ幸いに存じます。また、この調査結果にご関心のある方は、返信用封筒の裏にお名前をお書き添えのうえ、調査票とともにご返却いただければ、集計完了後、結果をお送り致します。何とぞよろしくお願い申し上げます。

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## 卒業論文について

Q5 あなたの専門分野で学生が卒論を書く際、どのような能力  
(技能を含む)が必要でしょうか。下の(1)~(18)について、  
その重要度を評価して下さい(当てはまる番号を○で囲ん  
でください)。

	(1) 非常に 重要	(2) 少し 重要	(3) あまり 重要で ない	(4) まったく 重要で ない
(1) 既成の考えや主張について批評できること	1	2	3	4
(2) 独創的な考え方ができること	1	2	3	4
(3) 自分の考えを明確に表現する力	1	2	3	4
(4) 適切な学術的表現を使えること	1	2	3	4
(5) 本や論文の中にある著者の考えを自分のことばで 正確に表現できること	1	2	3	4
(6) 文献から得た知識と卒論のテーマをうまく関連づけること	1	2	3	4
(7) 引用の仕方など正しい作法を守って書けること	1	2	3	4
(8) 当該の学問分野における論文の書き方を知っていること	1	2	3	4
(9) 考えを論理的に組み立てられる力	1	2	3	4
(10) 事実や統計、具体例などを用いて自分の主張を裏付けられること	1	2	3	4
(11) 関連する文献の収集の仕方をよく知っていること	1	2	3	4
(12) 研究計画案を立てる力	1	2	3	4
(13) 実験を正確に遂行する力	1	2	3	4
(14) 学術的な議論を展開する力	1	2	3	4
(15) データを分析する力	1	2	3	4
(16) 外国語で読み・書きが十分できる力	1	2	3	4
(17) 日本語で読み・書きが十分できる力	1	2	3	4
(18) その他 ( )	1	2	3	4

Q6 上の(1)~(18)の中で、学生にとって特に指導が必要だと思われる項目を4つ選んで番号を  
書いてください。

学生の「引用の仕方」について
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- Q7 大学生は、他人の考えや文章などを出典を明示せず  
に用いることがあるという指摘があります。この問題に関し、下の(1)~(5)についてご意見をお聞かせください。

	(1) 完全に同意する	(2) 少し同意する	(3) あまり同意できない	(4) 全く同意できない
(1) たいいていの学生は、きちんと出典を明示する引用の仕方を知っている。	1	2	3	4
(2) 他人の考えに賛同すれば、特に出典を明示する必要はないと学生は考えている	1	2	3	4
(3) 講義や教科書で紹介された考えは出典を明示しなくてもよいと学生は考えている。	1	2	3	4
(4) 意図的に出典を明示せずに他人の考えを引用しているレポートがあれば、教師は拒むべきである。	1	2	3	4
(5) 全体的に正しい引用の仕方がもっと指導されるべきだ。	1	2	3	4

- Q8 学生がレポートや卒論を書くという経験を通して獲得する能力はどのようなものとお考えでしょうか。「書く」経験や訓練の最終的な目標は何でしょうか。ご意見をお聞かせください。

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