

## CHAPTER 4

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### Using Grice's Maxims to Reflect on Project-Based Writing

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#### INTRODUCTION

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In this chapter, we illustrate the way students make use of Grice's maxims (Grice, 1989) to reflect on their project-based learning experiences in a detailed case study. In our English- medium context at the American University of Sharjah, all students are required to do a number of general education writing courses taught by the English Department. These courses aim to develop the students' ability to be independently responsible for their own writing. We will focus here on one course experience in which the students were asked to write three essays as part of a semester-long project on a topic of their own choosing. The courses aimed to develop critical argumentation skills in support of a socially responsible, relevant project. In addition to the actual essays they wrote during the courses, we asked the students to reflect on their own writing after each piece. They were trained to use Grice's maxims to inform their reflections.

Our broader funded project investigated reflective writing as a regular exercise in both self- awareness and critical thinking about our own writing process.

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The student's commitment to improve his usage of the maxims in future writing is evident in the use of the commissive form of modality in; *"I will make a conscious effort to repeatedly proof read essays in the future."*, *"Moving forward, I will strive to continue using the maxim's as well as draw on experience to further improve my writing as I will look to incorporate feedback received throughout the semester."* This indicates his intent to apply all of Grice's maxims in an effective manner going forward, but is not of course evidence that he actually will do that.

The student has referenced the maxims multiple times and it is evident that he has put time and effort into the study and application of the maxims. There are still areas that need improvement so we could call this a 'work in progress'. The need to improve in certain areas is also stated by the student as self-criticism, which could provide some clarity on future action.

## CONCLUSION

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At this early stage of reporting our work on a long-term project, we would not like to make exaggerated claims in favour of using Grice's maxims as a useful tool of self-reflection. If we compare the student research team's analysis to the student analysis, we can perhaps make a provisional conclusion that Grice's maxims did prove to be a useful reflective tool in this case. Naturally, our further research on a larger number of cases will allow us to draw fuller conclusions at a later stage. While not reported here, recent analyses do tend to concur with the conclusions drawn here.

Importantly, the above analyses do so far meet what we could term a 'sincerity' condition, in that the student research team did not always agree either with each other or with the student. They were prepared to acknowledge this openly. In a process of qualitative analysis by different researchers, a complete consensus of opinion could indicate enforced consent.

In terms of social responsibility, the topic of 'sleep deprivation' can be termed in itself a relevant and socially responsible topic in that it is identified as a common issue affecting the well-being of (first-year) students. In this chapter, however, we would like to consider 'social responsibility' as condition of the research conducted for a project too. The type of sincere disagreement we illustrate above is essential, especially in the light of Dohn's (2011) concerns, which alert us to this overarching need to verify sincerity. Clearly, this is also a condition of socially responsible research. It is clear that the student from our case study was still developing his research reporting skills. At the same time, there is a consensus that

using the maxims was helping him and could continue to help him to do this in the future. A further stage of our project must therefore be to investigate continued post-class use of the maxims.

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