

## **Hypertext Adventures: Computer-assisted Teaching of Technical Report Writing in Delft**

**BAS A. ANDEWEG, ERIKA R. HOEKSTRA, JAAP C. DE JONG,  
SABINE KUNST**

*Department of Applied Linguistics, Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands.  
Fax: (0)15-787105*

**Abstract.** Technical engineers consider communication and writing skills to be among the most difficult aspects of their profession. Communication courses, however, are expensive, because teaching takes place in tutorial groups in which students are given feedback regularly. A computer-assisted practical that aims at diminishing the amount of effort of the lecturer while increasing the participation of the students through interactive and user-friendly courseware is described. The program is developed in the Knowledge Pro environment (MS-Windows 3). The program consists of three modules: 1) a product module which offers examples of 'ideal texts' and criteria for them; 2) a style module which offers information on stylistic aspects such as sentence complexity, use of examples, use of connectives, spelling etc.; 3) a process module, which offers a standard procedure for planning and outlining a technical report and an example, in the form of a (hyper)text adventure.

Besides, the program offers individual advice to students who face problems during the writing process. In each module the student can opt for additional examples or exercises via buttons, menus and hypertext paths. The program has been written in the Dutch language.

### **INTRODUCTION**

A survey carried out in 1985 in the Netherlands amongst more than 1600 engineers revealed that the respondents considered communication and writing skills to be among the most difficult aspects of their profession (Vonderen-van Staveren & Vaags, 1985). For many years now the department of Applied Linguistics of Delft University of Technology has offered courses in oral and writing skills for professional purposes. Although the number of enthusiastic students who enrol for these courses has doubled over the past four years, the course 'technical report writing' has become an obligatory component in the curriculum of only four of the fourteen Delft engineering studies. For this there may be two reasons.

First, as a result of an educational reform the period of academic study in The Netherlands has been reduced from six to four years. The position of the so-called non-technical subjects, and thus also of technical writing courses, has therefore become even more delicate.

Secondly, communication courses are expensive, because teaching takes place in tutorial groups (practicals) in which students are given