Signalling nouns (SNs) are abstract nouns like *fact*, *idea*, *problem*, and *result* which are non-specific in their meaning when considered in isolation and specific in their meaning by reference to their linguistic context. SNs contribute to cohesion and evaluation in discourse. This work offers the first book-length study of the SN phenomenon to treat the functional and discourse features of the category as primary.

Using a balanced corpus of authentic data, the book explores the lexicogrammatical and discourse features of SNs in academic journal articles, textbooks, and lectures across a range of disciplines in the natural and social sciences. The book will be essential reading for researchers and advanced students of semantics, syntax, corpus linguistics, and discourse analysis, in addition to scholars and teachers in the field of English for Academic Purposes.

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I have been studying signalling nouns for a very long time. In fact, my first presentation on the topic was at the 24th Annual TESOL convention in Baltimore, USA in 1994. The title of that presentation was Rhetorical/organizational Lexis in English for Academic Purposes. The term signalling noun was coined in this talk. This partly explains why I use the term signalling noun in preference to other terms found in the literature, such as type 3 vocabulary, carrier noun, anaphoric noun, lexical label, and shell noun. All of these terms refer to various aspects of the same phenomenon, and this is another reason for using my own term; a signalling noun has very much in common with all of these other terms but it also has particular specific features which are not shared by all of these other terms.

It is only now that, with the collaboration of Richard W. Forest, I have felt ready to present a book-length study on the signalling noun phenomenon. So this book represents the result of many years of thinking about and investigating the signalling noun phenomenon. During these years many people have helped my thinking and have helped me in practical ways.

The first person to make me interested in corpus linguistics was the sadly departed John Sinclair, a man who can be considered a doyen of corpus linguistics. John visited the Middle-Eastern University where I was working, Sultan Qaboos University, Sultanate of Oman, in the mid 1980s and introduced me and my colleagues to corpus linguistics. Following this visit, a very talented technician there, David Poulton, designed a concordancer for our use (concordancers were not generally available at the time) and I started to do concordancing work with the academic discourse that students at Sultan Qaboos University were having to grapple with. It was during this time that, with the use of the concordancer and word frequency function, I realised the importance of what I later termed signalling nouns in academic discourse.

Another important figure in my thinking on signalling nouns was Michael Hoey. Mike’s work on lexical patterning in discourse is well known and his...
discourse approach to lexis was influential in my thinking. I think I also probably ‘borrowed’ the term signalling (perhaps subconsciously) from an early monograph of his, *Signalling in Discourse* published by the English Language Studies Unit at the University of Birmingham, although Mike’s view of signalling is broader in its application than to just nouns.

A third influential figure, although I have never had the opportunity to meet him in person, is Hans-Jörg Schmid, author of *Abstract Nouns as Conceptual Shells: From Corpus to Cognition*. This book has been very influential in my thinking on signalling nouns and is much cited in the present volume. Of course, I am also indebted to the work of Eugene Winter, Gill Francis, Ros Ivanic, and others on this same topic. A fourth person I should acknowledge is Michael Halliday, who was kind enough to spend time with me discussing my work on signalling nouns, in particular the semantic categories, the final version of which I alone am responsible for.

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It takes a long time to write a book, as many readers of the volume will already be aware, and the number of debts accrued, both personal and intellectual, are many. My greatest debt is to my co-author, John Flowerdew, for inviting me to join him on the project when I was completing my Ph.D. studies with him some years ago. Since then, we have worked on this book together in both Hong Kong and Leeds, and separately with me working from my position at Central Michigan University and him in his at City University of Hong Kong. I am indebted to him both for his confidence in me on the project and for his insights into the nature of the signalling noun phenomenon. His observations regarding the importance of analysing signalling nouns from the perspective of discourse are integral to the approach taken by this volume, and it is richer for it. Moreover, his personal support during work on the project, both as a colleague and friend, has been invaluable.

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I would also like to reiterate John’s acknowledgement of Susan Fitzmaurice, series co-editor at Cambridge and Merja Kytö, the series editor for their approval of the proposal and for Merja’s careful reading of the manuscript, as well as Helen Barton, commissioning editor at Cambridge and her assistant Helena Dowson. Finally, the feedback of the anonymous reviewer of the original proposal was valuable and is appreciated.

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Department of English at City University of Hong Kong provided me with a Visiting Young Scholar position to continue work on the project, enabling me to spend much of the summer working closely with John tagging the corpus and further developing the theoretical foundations of the study. In the intervening years, funding to support further travel and research on the book has been provided by Central Michigan University’s Department of English Language and Literature, College of Humanities and Social and Behavioral Sciences, and Office of Research and Sponsored programs. The support of these institutions has been essential to my ability to contribute to this project.