Academic writing: an introduction

Student & Library Services
Learning and Research Support
Learning Outcomes

• By the end of this workshop, you should be able to:
  • recognise the characteristics of academic writing
  • identify some of the problems you face in academic writing
  • apply some techniques to help
  • interpret assignment titles
This workshop is:

• an introduction to academic writing
• practical
• not subject-specific
• not focused on specific styles of writing e.g. critical analysis, reflective writing
Worksheet Activity 1

• Talk to the person next to you for 2 minutes about what concerns you have regarding your writing

• Then spend 1 minute writing about what concerns you
Possible problems?

• Getting started
• My grammar and punctuation
• Getting the language right – I’m too informal
• What to write – how to understand the question
• Structure
• Keeping within the word count
• I haven’t written this type of assignment before ...
• Developing my own voice
Getting started - freewriting

- Give yourself a set time limit
- Write/type as quickly as you can with any ideas you may have, in any order
- If you can’t think of anything to write, repeat your topic or something like, “I’m waiting for ideas to come and they will, I’m waiting for ideas to come and they will,” over and over until they do come
- Don’t bother about writing sentences, or using correct punctuation, grammar or spelling – concentrate on writing something. If you like the ideas, you can make them into proper sentences later on

Getting started – some other techniques

• Scribble
• Mind-mapping
• Bullet points
• Write by talking
• Mark the paper
• Write questions

What are the elements of academic writing? **The TIME Model**

**Targeted**
Your assignment should be focused on the questions and criteria, make a decision and follow an argument.

**In-depth**
You should consider your topics thoroughly, thinking about all possible aspects, and including the argument for and against different viewpoints.

**Measured**
Your work needs to be cautious, emotionally neutral and formal – written in the third person and in full sentences.

**Evidence-based**
You should reference all the ideas in your work, and apply critical thinking to your evidence.
• Concentrate on understanding what is required of you
  • Everything you write should be adding to your argument

• Clue words
### Some clue words

| **Analyze** | Pick out the key points of a topic. Consider those key points in depth, including how they relate to each other. |
| **Compare** | Look at the similarities and differences between two aspects. Say if any are more important than others. |
| **Describe** | Give a detailed explanation of a topic of issue. |
| **Discuss** | Write about both sides of a topic in depth, pointing out advantages and disadvantages. Come to a conclusion. |
| **Explain** | Make it clear how and why something happens. |
| **Identify** | Point out what a topic covers. |

See the handout at [http://libguides.tees.ac.uk/ld.php?content_id=14149964](http://libguides.tees.ac.uk/ld.php?content_id=14149964)
Succeed@Tees workshop: Structuring your assignment
Worksheet Activity 2

• Read the article ‘Pongy foods break-through in fat war’

• Consider what would need to change to make it a piece of academic writing.
  • Which language is unsuitable?
  • What is missing?
Follow-up Activity

• Read the abstract for the study from the journal article
• Is it what you expected from reading the newspaper article?
Features of an academic writing style:

- Cautious
- Emotionally neutral
- Formal
- No slang
- To express not to impress
Academic Phrasebank

• Website which gives ways of beginning sentences in an academic way
• Covers different parts of assignments e.g. introductions, conclusions, referring to literature etc.
• http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk
WEED model for paragraphs

One point per paragraph, incorporating evidence

- **What** - topic sentence
- **Evidence** - references
- **Examples** – expanding on evidence
- **Do** - sum up – so what?

Succeed@Tees workshop: How to use references
Keeping within the word count

• Look at the marking criteria for your assignment
• Which areas get most marks?
• Have you allocated them sufficient words?
• Writing is difficult – we all draft and re-write
• Be concise
• Edit unnecessary detail
Worksheet Activity 3

Read the extract in question, and write a more concise version on your worksheet.
Suggested Answer to Activity

The researchers interviewed five students, who volunteered in response to an email and poster in the Students’ Union.
Proofreading Tips

✓ Leave your assignment for a few days – come to it with a fresh perspective.

✓ Read it aloud

✓ Use spell check – but with caution!

✓ Proofread several times, looking at different aspects each time

✓ Look over your past assignments – make a note of your common mistakes.

✓ Get a friend to look over your work, but develop your own proofreading skills too.

Help available from: http://libguides.tees.ac.uk/proofreading
Support Available

• Learning Hub
  • Website including online tutorial on academic writing
  • One-to-one tutorials  http://libguides.tees.ac.uk/learning_hub

• Royal Literary Fellows
  • Professional writers, independent of the university
  • https://www.facebook.com/rlfteesside
Other workshops available

• Critical thinking
• Critical writing
• How to use references
• Introduction to Harvard referencing
• Reflective writing
• Report writing
• Strategies for reading academic articles
• Structuring your assignment
• What makes a good sentence?
Resources


Questions?