

ENGLISH ACADEMIC WRITING

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English Academic Writing Course

Course Description and Objectives

The Academic Writing Course focuses on development of academic writing skills of MA students of Social Sciences, by raising awareness of, practicing and reflecting upon the conventions of written texts. In addition the course will help the students become familiar with genres of and enhance skills related to critique, argumentation and research-based writing. MA students will acquire an awareness of and ability to use effectively the discourse patterns of Academic English, improve critical reading and thinking skills, have an opportunity to develop writing process through generating ideas, drafting, peer evaluation and teacher grading, learn to take into consideration the expectations of their readership with regard to academic discourse conventions. Students will also learn how to incorporate the work of other authors into their own writing according to existing requirements of academic practice. The course will cover four main genres of academic writing: argumentative essay, critique, position paper and research paper. Upon completion of the course the students will be familiar with the conventions of writing research papers in English academic community in the chosen field of study .

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1. The Process of Writing

In this chapter we will focus on the process of writing. The process of writing generally consists of the following stages: prewriting, drafting and revising.

In the prewriting stage, writers take time to think about their topic and generate ideas. They also spend some time focusing and planning the piece of writing.

Generating Ideas. Sometimes a student is frustrated because he/she can not think of anything to say about the topic. In this section, you will learn a number of strategies and techniques for generating ideas.

Invention Techniques

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a way of associating ideas and stimulating thinking. To brainstorm, start with a word or phrase and let your thoughts go in whatever direction they will. For a set period of time, do not attempt to think logically but write *a list of ideas* as quickly as possible, putting down whatever comes to your mind without looking back or organizing. After the set time is up, look over what you have listed to see if any of the ideas are related and can be grouped. You can use brainstorming to focus on a particular topic or to develop more examples or ideas for your essay in progress.

Education

primary curriculum*

secondary timetable*

high workload*

BA degree MA degree*

degree BA course

certificate of secondary education MA course*

diploma education fee*

lecturer* education facilities*

student* computer lab*

pupil sports facilities*

homework* canteen*

tasks* clubs

presentations* teacher

On the basis of the above example we can see that the writer has marked with an asterisk the ideas that he/she could use to write a description of an MA course at a particular university or institute.

Task 1.

Using the above example write a paragraph about either undergraduate (BA) or graduate or (MA) courses at your university.

Free-writing

Free-writing is writing without stopping. It means writing whatever comes to your mind without worrying whether your ideas are good or the grammar is correct but the ideas should be related to the topic. Its purpose is to free your mind to let it make associations and connections. So when you freewrite do not interrupt the flow of your ideas. Write them as they come to you. Do not cross anything out. When you freewrite set a time limit. After you have finished, reread what you have written and look for interesting ideas or insights that might be useful to you in your writing.

WH-questions

When newspaper reporters write articles, they try to answer the following questions in the first sentence of the report: **who, what, when, where, why** and sometimes **how**. You can use the same questions to generate material for your writing. Asking these questions allows you to see your topic from different points of view and may help to clarify your position on the topic. To use this technique, write out as many WH-questions as you can. Then answer them as fully as you can.

Clustering

Clustering is making a visual map of your ideas. It frees you from following a strictly linear sequence, thus it may allow you to think more creatively and make new associations. To use this technique, begin with your topic circled in the middle of a sheet of paper. Then, draw a line out from the circle and write ideas associated with it. When you have finished, study your map to find new associations about your topic and to see the relationship of ideas.

Task 2:

Look at the diagram below. The diagram is a visual map of the topic *Transition to democracy*. Add some more changes caused by the transition and then decide what sub topic you would like to write about, then cluster or group the ideas and write a paragraph.

Transition to democracy

political changes	economic changes	social changes
changes of political system	changes of election system	unemployment
middle class effects on retired people	well-off/rich people	transition to market economy

2. The Argumentative Essay

Argumentative Essay Syllabus

Class	Topic	Course Objectives
I	Course Introduction The Stages of Writing Process	Introduce students to the course syllabus and band scale. Familiarize students with main stages of writing process and practice generating ideas. Introduce students to pre-writing techniques and practice them. Enable students to understand the structure of a paragraph and a topic sentence
II	The Argumentative Essay Structure	Enable students to understand the main features and the role of each element of an argumentative essay.
III	Composition Skills Writing Workshop	To assist students in clear reproduction of their ideas in written form. Provide students with the experience of drafting and receiving peer feedback on a piece of writing
IV	Analyzing Results of the Previous Class More Practice	The teacher distributes the graded assignments and analyses the results
V	Test I	Writing argumentative essays

Introduction to Argumentation¹

Nearly every piece of academic writing is in some way argumentative. You are required not only to paraphrase other people's ideas but also to use them to argue in favor of your own opinion. Your decisions about which information to include, whom to quote, which methodology to use should depend on what position you support and what your case is.

It is important to note that your writing should be convincing for your readership. It means you need to develop means or strategies to express your opinion and ideas effectively. Therefore studying argumentation assists you to understand and gradually learn and employ these strategies. The process of producing a clear and convincing argument helps a writer to mature as a thinker and a critic because written argumentation facilitates the development of such important mental skills as developing and organizing ideas, evaluating evidence, observing logical consistency and expressing yourself clearly and laconically.

¹ Adapted from "Academic Writing for Graduate Students", CEU Center for Academic Writing 2005

Micro-level Argumentation – Paragraphing

1. What is a paragraph?

A paragraph is a group of sentences that support and develop a single idea or one aspect of a large and more complex topic. The paragraph performs three functions:

- it introduces a new topic (or aspect of a topic) and develops it
- visually and logically, it distinguishes the present (new) topic from the previous one and from the following one
- as a result of this, it shows a logical relation between the sentences within the paragraph

2. The Structure of a Paragraph

Like the essay as a whole, a paragraph has a structure, which includes an introductory or a topic sentence, a development of this topic sentence, and a conclusion.

a. The topic sentence

Most paragraphs will have a topic sentence. The topic presents the subject of the paragraph; the remainder of the paragraph then supports and develops that statement with carefully related details. Because it introduces the subject that the paragraph is to develop, the topic sentence is typically the first sentence of the paragraph. It is effective in this position because the reader knows immediately what the paragraph is about.

Example:

Much has been written about the social problems caused by the transition to democracy in Central Europe. (In certain situations, however the topic sentence may appear elsewhere. For example in an argumentative essay in the introductory paragraph, the topic sentence is the thesis statement [see the definition of a thesis statement below]).

b. Expansion or restatement

It is very common after the topic sentence for writers to develop further or expand their main idea. This may also involve a more detailed or qualified restatement of the topic sentence.

Example:

Indeed, in the long term, it may be that the social problems of transition will in fact prove more difficult to overcome than either political or economic issues.

c. Limitation

Another common strategy after the topic sentence is to immediately limit or narrow the paragraph or a precise aspect of this topic which will be discussed.

Example:

Amongst these problems, however, some of the most serious are those experienced by women, whether this be in the family or in the workplace.

d. Illustration

A frequent feature of good paragraphs is that having made a claim in the topic sentence and elaborated it, the writer then brings examples or evidence to support his or her claim. This can be very helpful in persuading the reader of the validity of the writer's position. In academic writing, this illustration may well take the form of quotation from or reference to research carried out by others.

Example:

Research by Hofstetter and Igel (1995), for example, has shown that women in former East Germany experienced considerably higher rates of depression and resorted more often to psychiatric help in coping with social change than their male counterparts.

e. **Analysis**

Of course it is not enough to simply drop an example. Having given an example, the writer must then analyse and demonstrate what the example proves and what can be learnt from it.

Example:

While one can not of course dismiss the possibility that these figures are skewed by men's refusal to seek help for fear of appearing "weak", nevertheless, comparable research in Hungary (Randoni 1997) suggests that the areas in which the greatest social change has occurred, notably the conflict between breadwinning and childrearing, are areas where women are more involved than men.

f. **Conclusion**

Finally, the writer needs to "finish off" the paragraph, usually concluding with a sentence that either reiterates or states modified from the idea presented by the topic sentence. Effective paragraphs rarely finish with an example.

Example:

Clearly then, the study of the social effects of transition should not neglect gender as an important factor for consideration.

3. The Features of a Paragraph

Through the component parts that make up a paragraph there are three features that are common to all good paragraphs. These are coherence, cohesion and adequacy of development.

a) Coherence

The entire paragraph should concern itself with a single focus, as expressed in the topic sentence. If it begins with one focus or major points of discussion, it should not end with another or wonder within different ideas. The sentences should lead on from each other logically so that each one answers the question that comes into the reader's mind when they read the sentence before it. If the reader has to go back to read again two or three times to understand what you have written, this is an indication that the paragraph is not coherent and that sentences do not logically flow from one another.

b) Cohesion

In a cohesive paragraph, each sentence relates clearly to the topic sentence and to the sentences on either side of it. Cohesive devices such as transition words (first, for example, however) or reference words (this, the question, she) make clear to the reader both where the paragraph is going and how each sentence relates to the others. A cohesive paragraph also highlights the ties between old information and new information to make the structure of ideas or arguments clear to the reader.

At the beginning of a new paragraph you should check that any previous pronouns (he, she, it) or definite references (this matter, the problem) which refer backwards in the text can be understood within the paragraph and do not require to go back to the previous paragraph.

c) Adequate development

The topic introduced in the topic sentence should be discussed fully and adequately. Academic writing demands a thorough and careful analysis.