

Writing and Study Skills Services – Laurier Brantford
Ten Essential Features of Academic Writing
As Outlined in the Brief Penguin Handbook

No matter what your academic writing task is, there are several essential features that must be present in order for you to write a good paper:

Introduction: starts your essay and introduces your chosen topic to the reader.

- The main purposes of the introduction are to inform, introduce, and engage. When writing the introduction you want to be as specific as possible, avoid broad generalizations, and try to create a blueprint for what your paper will be about.

Thesis: a concise statement that sums up your argument or main idea for the reader.

- It's usually stated near the beginning of your paper, in your introduction. It should state what your topic is and what points you would like to make about your topic.

Academic writing task: the task that you have been assigned to write.

- Before you begin writing or even researching your paper, read the assignment sheet *thoroughly* and understand what you are being asked to do. Most of the time, when someone makes a mistake in regard to the academic writing task, it is because they did not understand what was being asked of them. If you don't understand, you could end up doing the whole assignment wrong.

Argument: the support for your thesis statement is what persuades your reader.

- You should be able to argue your main points using the information that you researched. Without evidence or proof, your points aren't going to persuade the reader (or the marker). Advancing an argument is one of the most important aspects of a paper.

Organization and structure: your thoughts need to be explained in a logical sequence as outlined in your introduction.

- Structure the body of your paper in a manner that flows. Ideas should be grouped according to how they relate to each other, not all over the place.

Paragraph development: each paragraph is a unit and should have only one clear idea.

- Often times there are too few paragraphs in a paper. Instead of breaking large paragraphs into smaller ones, they attempt to fit too much information in one. It is important that each main idea has its own paragraph so that it can be fully explored. When a new idea arises, start a new paragraph.

Citations and plagiarism: forgetting to cite, or citing improperly, makes you guilty of plagiarizing.

- With all of the information handed out at the beginning of each academic term about plagiarism, students can no longer claim ignorance. It's important that all ideas borrowed from other work, even if paraphrased, are cited properly in a paper, using an accepted academic style.

Word choice: can help make a paper readable, or do just the opposite and make it unbearable to read.

- Avoid jargon and obscure or outdated words. Use words that are as close to everyday language as possible, while still maintaining an academic tone. With word choice, it is also important that you choose the right word for your intended point. For example, choosing effect when you should have chose affect, or then vs. than affects the clarity of your writing. Writers need to understand the difference and choose the right terms.

Sentence construction: a sentence, at its most basic, consists of one main clause and writers should limit each sentence to one idea.

- If a writer doesn't properly construct a sentence, readers will have a hard time understanding the point being made.

Spelling and grammar: it is hard for readers to take an author seriously if the paper is filled with spelling mistakes and grammar errors.

- Some simple spelling mistakes can change the word that the author intended to use and, as a result, change the idea being argued. Consider definitely and defiantly. If a writer misspells definitely and relies on spell check, often it's "defiantly" that comes up. If the writer then chooses "defiantly," it changes the entire sentence's meaning and goes beyond just a simple spelling mistake.
- Grammar is also important to academic writing. Proper grammar creates clear, concise writing and ensures that meaning is conveyed accurately.

Works Cited:

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