

Lecture 1. Introduction to Academic Writing

1. What is academic writing?

Tertiary level students are supposed to write different forms of assignments during their academic studies (essay, paper, research paper, dissertation, article, lab/business report, etc). These assignments are referred to as “Academic writing” which follow certain conventions of structure, style and content. However, all of these assignments have the same goal and principles and address a specific type of audience i.e. “target reader” (Mennens MSc & Wilkinson MSc, 2002).

Although it may be seen as a torture by many students, academic writing assignment gives *you* an opportunity to investigate an issue and present your position based on the evidence of your research. It is your space to choose what seems to you as interesting subject, it is your own spot to stand up and convey your message, it also offers you the attention of an audience that is interested in reading what you think. Academic writing allows you to contribute to the academic debate; you evaluate the arguments of others and you suggest your own.

2. Characteristics of academic writing

In academic paper writing, you need to ask a good question then find answers to it. Discussing and interpreting your answers with logic and arguments show your understanding and appreciation of your topic and this is what earns you a good grade. The language in academic texts tends to be “precise, impersonal and objective” (Hartley, 2008: 3) in the sense that the writer avoids value judgments and biases and uses formal vocabulary, and references. Judgmental words such as *terrible*, *appalling*, *fantastic*, or *incredible* should be avoided. Heady (2007) lists the following characteristics of a good academic writing.

- It demonstrates good mechanical skills, including grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
- It is well organized, with main ideas introduced early on and defended, complicated, and refined through the paper.
- It is coherent and unified.
- It explores and explains worthwhile content.
- It is free from filler phrases, verbal tics, and space-wasters.
- It is aware of its audience.
- It situates itself within a discipline, discourse community, or scholarly field.

Academic writing is specific and deals with facts, not assumptions. Consider these two statements:

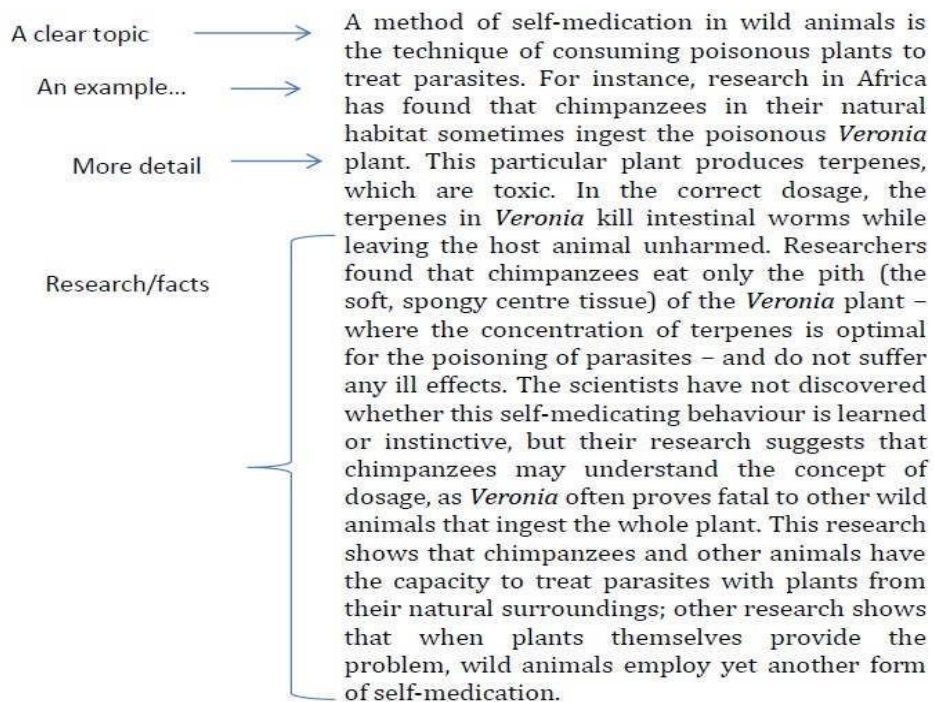
- *At university students are expected to write academically.*
- *At James Cook University, students are expected to write academically by using formal language, clear structure and referencing.*

It is based on critical judgments of ideas rather than an appeal of emotions. However, personal comments and viewpoints are expressed in some areas of research.

Moreover, clarity is also necessary to convey the intended idea in a straightforward tone. Pretentious statements are not necessarily meaningful. Consider this statement:

“The research referred to herein showed a multiplicity of factors that contributed to the multiple findings which indicated...”

Consider this examples:



3. The purpose of academic writing

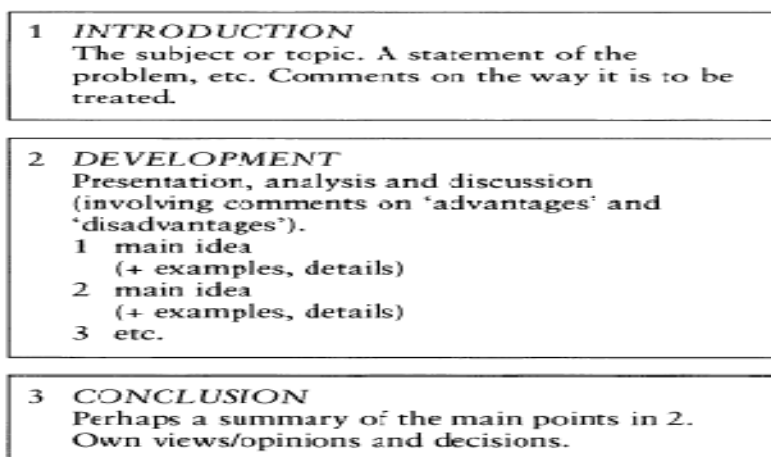
According to Bailey (2011: 3), most writers write for one of the following reasons:

- To report on a piece of research the writer has conducted
- To answer a question the writer has been given or chosen
- To discuss a subject of common interest and give the writer's view
- To synthesize research done by others on a topic

4. The structure of academic writing

Many academic written pieces are organized in similar structure that demonstrates the logical order and coherence of different parts. This structure depends on introduction-body- conclusion pattern of organization. The introduction sets the ground for the subject, states the problem, or/and introduces the topic and the way it is to be treated. The body (the development of ideas) presents, analyzes, and discusses the subject with necessary details and illustrations. The conclusion sums up what has been discussed, gives final comments on the topic, and leaves the reader with the sense of closure. The graph demonstrates the structure of academic writing pieces.

STRUCTURE



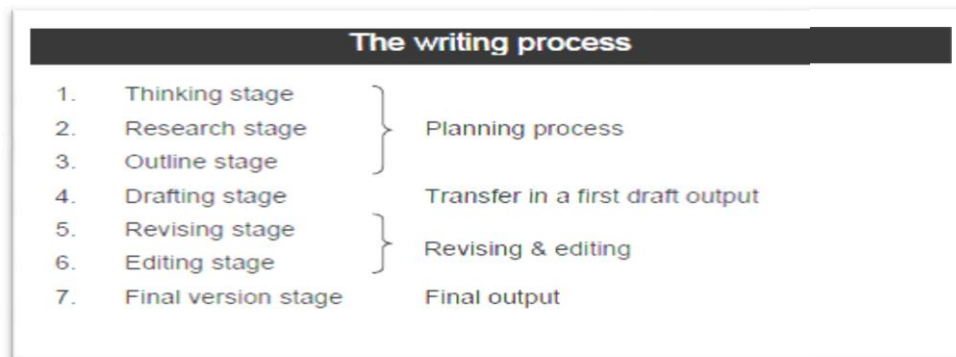
In writing your dissertation it is recommended to follow the structure and purposes of writing an academic research. Your purpose is to present, analyse, discuss and interpret your research findings in a way that reflects your personality and point of view as an academic researcher. It is therefore required not only to describe and

report your own or other researchers' findings but also to synthesis these in such a way that they help to present a clear and logical argument.

These considerations are highly essential in your disseration mainly in your literature review. In literature review, your are not supposed to simply show how much you have read about the subject or report what others have written or found. The ultimate purpose is to relate your rsearch question (s) and supporting arguments to the existing literature.

5. Academic writing process

What distinguishes academic writing from other forms of writing is its “rules and practices” (Bowker.2007). These rules and practices are mainly related to a formal structure of ideas, referencing and citation techniques, writing mechanics (grammar, punctuation, and spelling) and argumentative and persuasive nature of composition. Therefore, to write a good academic paper you need to follow certain steps which constitute the writing process. Mennens Msc and Wilkinson Msc (2002. 3) distinguish seven steps in the writing process.



Although the writing process suggests that writing is linear, it must be recognized that academic writing is recursive (zigzag process). The usual case in writing is that you switch directions and you backtrack your ideas. You may work on an outline and you find it too broad, you may be working on a topic sentence and you realize that it could be your concluding idea, and you may eliminate whole sections while revising the final draft, etc.

It must be emphasized that academic writing is a skill like other skills as driving, painting, and dancing. It gets better through regular practice that leads to proficiency and expertise.

References

- Bailey, S. (2011). *Academic writing: a handbook for international students*. New York: Routledge.
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- Jordan, R. R. (1999). *Academic writing course: study skills in English*. England: Pearson Education Limited. Longman.
- Hartley, J. (2008). *Academic writing and publishing*. New York: Routledge.
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- Mennens MSc, H. & Wilkinson MSc, B. (2002). *Academic writing skills*. University of Maastricht.

Classroom Practice

Practice 1: Credibility in academic writing

Audience often makes judgments on how well supported your ideas or arguments are, and whether that support is valid, relevant, sufficient and convincing.

➤ Which of the following statements reads as most credible and convincing? Why?

1. Emotional intelligence is essential in the practice of management.
2. In my opinion emotional intelligence is essential in the practice of management.
3. According to Smith (1967) emotional intelligence is essential in the practice of management.
4. Jones (2004) argues that emotional intelligence is essential in the practice of management. In his view successful management practice hinges on effective communication between people, and emotional intelligence can contribute to that.

Practice 2: preciseness in Academic Writing: Acknowledging exceptions and limitations

➤ How would you make these sentences more precise?

1. Narrative is the structure used for a novel or film.
2. Historians believe that history is the study of significant past events which have relevance for the present and future.
3. Knowledge of grammar improves the standard of writing.
4. Smokers die at a younger age than non-smokers.

Task 3: Formality: Formal and impersonal language

- Some of the language in the following examples is more appropriate for speaking than writing. Identify which expressions are too informal and personal.
 1. **A)** When I look at the situation in emergency wards, with many staff leaving, it's hard not to worry about how many doctors will be available to treat patients in the future.
B) If we consider the situation in emergency wards, with increasingly low staff retention rates, there are concerns about the capacity of hospitals to maintain adequate doctor to patient ratios.
 2. **A)** It's so obvious that people were given jobs just because they were male or female. I don't think that is an acceptable approach and is even against the law.
B) It appears that in a number of instances jobs were assigned on the basis of gender. Given the current anti-discrimination laws, this raises serious concerns.
- Rewrite the sentences in a more academic style using verbs from the list below. Note that you may need to change the verb tense.

investigate	assist
raise	discover
establish	increase
eliminate	

1. Systems analysts can **help out** managers in many different ways.
2. This program was **set up** to improve access to medical care.
3. Medical research expenditure has **gone up** to nearly \$350 million.
4. Researchers have **found out** that this drug has serious side effects.
5. Exercise alone will not **get rid of** medical problems related to blood pressure.
6. Researchers have been **looking into** this problem for 15 years now.
7. This issue was **brought up** during the coroner's inquest.

Task 4: Clear sentences

- Look at the three texts below, all on the same topic. Which is the best text? Which is the worst text? Why?

Text 1

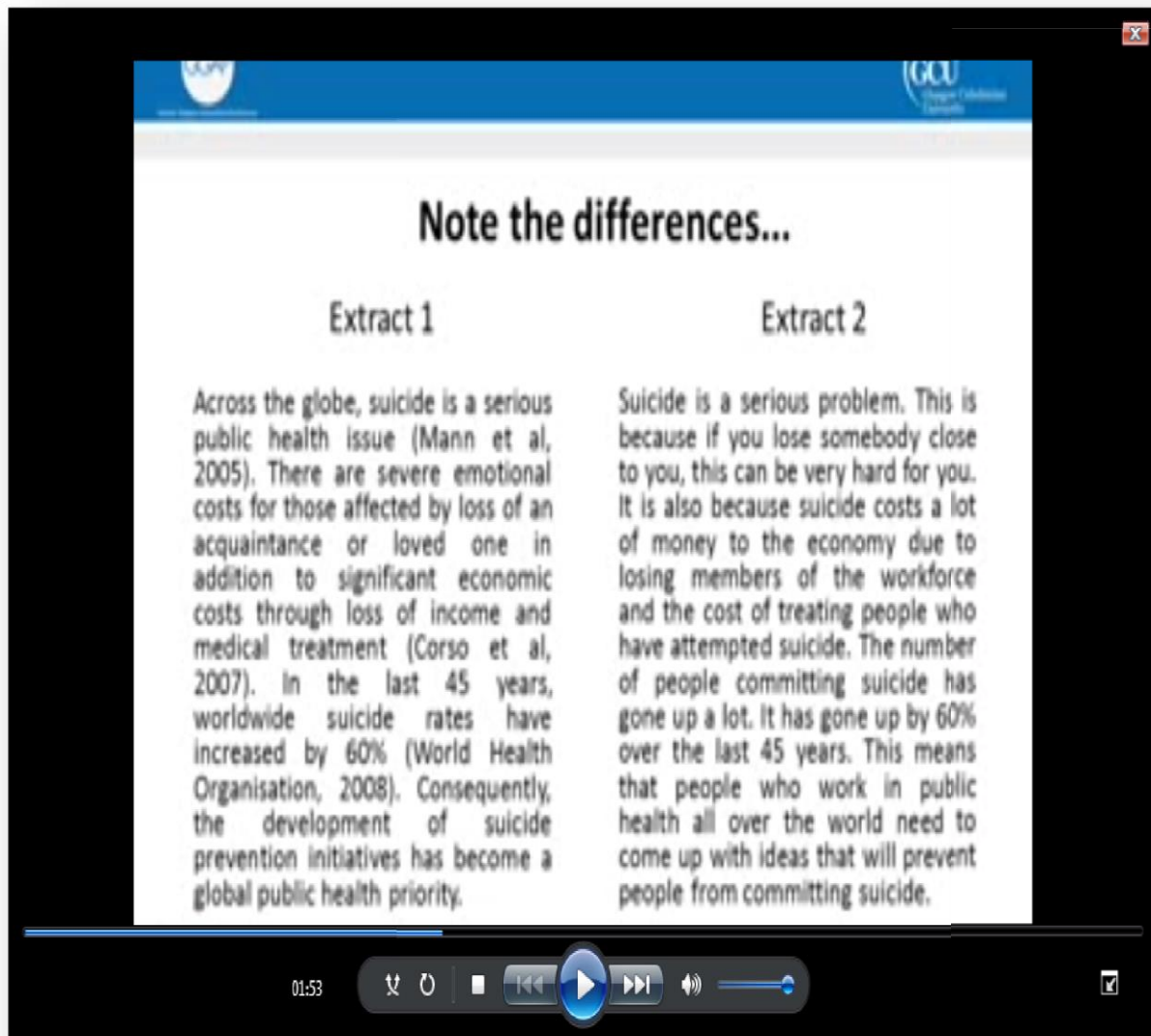
Two canine cadavers with orthopedic abnormalities were identified which included a first dog that had an unusual deformity secondary to premature closure of the distal ulnar physis and a second dog that had a hypertrophic nonunion of the femur, and the radius and femur of both dogs were harvested and cleaned of soft tissues. (54 words)

Text 2

Two canine cadavers with orthopedic abnormalities were identified. The first dog had an unusual deformity. It was secondary to premature closure of the distal ulnar physis. The second dog had a hypertrophic nonunion of the femur. The radius and femur of both dogs were harvested. They were cleaned of soft tissues. (51 words; average 8.5 words per sentence)

Text 3

Two canine cadavers with orthopedic abnormalities were identified. The first dog had an unusual deformity secondary to premature closure of the distal ulnar physis; the second, a hypertrophic nonunion of the femur. The radius and femur of both dogs were harvested and cleaned of soft tissues. (46 words; average 15.3 words per sentence)



The screenshot shows a video player interface with a slide titled "Note the differences...". The slide compares two extracts about suicide. Extract 1 is a formal, academic-style paragraph, while Extract 2 is a more conversational, personal-style paragraph. The video player controls at the bottom show a timestamp of 01:53 and various playback buttons.

Extract 1	Extract 2
Across the globe, suicide is a serious public health issue (Mann et al, 2005). There are severe emotional costs for those affected by loss of an acquaintance or loved one in addition to significant economic costs through loss of income and medical treatment (Corso et al, 2007). In the last 45 years, worldwide suicide rates have increased by 60% (World Health Organisation, 2008). Consequently, the development of suicide prevention initiatives has become a global public health priority.	Suicide is a serious problem. This is because if you lose somebody close to you, this can be very hard for you. It is also because suicide costs a lot of money to the economy due to losing members of the workforce and the cost of treating people who have attempted suicide. The number of people committing suicide has gone up a lot. It has gone up by 60% over the last 45 years. This means that people who work in public health all over the world need to come up with ideas that will prevent people from committing suicide.