University of Essex

How to improve your academic writing

In a recent survey, academic staff at the University identified the interrelated skills of **writing** and reasoning as the two most important skills for **success** in higher education; when asked which skills students most often lacked, writing was again at the top of their list.

What is the purpose of this booklet?

Although the nature of university-level study has changed in recent years, not least because of technology, one element has remained constant, guaranteeing success to students with a mastery of it: writing.

In a recent survey, academic staff at the University identified the interrelated skills of essay-writing and reasoning as the two most important skills for success in higher education; when asked which skills students most often lacked, essay-writing was again at the top of their list. Needless to say, writing ability is also highly prized by employers.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide a reference guide to some of the most common mistakes in academic writing and to heighten your appreciation of the logic and beauty of language, a good command of which will help you to think more clearly and deeply, and have a positive impact on every aspect of your academic work, not just assignments.

The examples that feature in this booklet are adapted from an analysis of first-year academic work, covering all faculties. The analysis found that most students are making the same mistakes. The good news is that these mistakes can be easily corrected by learning some simple rules, and it is never too late to learn.

This booklet has been structured into two main sections: (i) Punctuation and Grammar, and (ii) Reasoning. These are preceded by sections on Structuring an Essay and Parts of Speech (essential reading if you have forgotten how to tell your noun from your verb). In addition there are also sections on Useful Tips, Commonly Confused Words, Writing Support at Essex, and Further Reading. It can be read from cover to cover, or can be dipped into with a specific problem in mind.

If you want to be true to yourself – to be faithful to what you really think by expressing yourself clearly and precisely – then you should care about language… irrespective of the fact that it will improve your grades.

Writing is at the very heart of academic life. Good writing makes a good student. This booklet provides useful guidance and helpful tips certain to set you on course to a clear expression of the plain sense of things, not only at university but in the outside world as well. An assimilation of its content will bring immediate benefits. I recommend that you read it carefully before you write your next essay!

Dr Leon Burnett, Dean of Faculty of Humanities and Comparative Studies

1. Structuring an Essay

Before we explore the micro issues of writing (grammar and punctuation), it may help to think about the macro issues, especially essay structure. While your grammar and punctuation may improve gradually over time, you can take immediate and easy steps to improve the way you structure your essays, for which the following may be useful.

Introduction

The introduction is where you provide a route-map for the reader and make clear how your argument will develop (see opposite). One effective approach is to outline the main issues that you seek to address in your essay. It may also be appropriate to explain how you interpret the question. *In size, the introduction should generally be no more than 10% of the essay.*

Main body

It is up to you to decide on the best way to organise your essay. Whatever you decide, make sure you adopt a systematic or logical approach that is transparent to your readers. Keep them informed about the steps in your exposition (the presentation of your viewpoint). You are not writing a mystery or thriller, so do not leave the reader in suspense until the end; make your argument explicit and make sure every paragraph in the main body of your essay links to the ones before and after it. If it helps – and if it is appropriate – you could divide your essay into sections and subsections, giving each section a subheading or summary in a few words; you can always remove subheadings afterwards.

Conclusion

The conclusion is where you remind the reader of what you have done – the main issues you have addressed and what you have argued. The conclusion should contain no new material. Your conclusions should be clear, leaving the reader in no doubt as to what you think; you should also explain why your conclusions are important and significant. As Stella Cottrell (2003: 154) suggests, it may also be a good idea to link your final sentence to the question contained in the title. *In size, the conclusion should be no more than 10% of the essay.*

Reference list and/or bibliography

Appended to your essay should be a list of all the sources you have referred to (a reference list) and/or a list of all of the sources you have consulted but not referred to within the essay (a bibliography). Find out which is required by your department and which referencing system is preferred; it may be that they require both, either separately or combined.

Tip

You should be able to sum up the basic opinion or argument of your essay in a couple of lines. It may help to do this before you start writing.

Tip

'However they are worded, all assignment titles contain a central question which has to be answered. Your main task is to apply what you know – however brilliant your piece of writing, if it does not 'answer the question' you may get no marks at all.' (Cottrell 2003: 154)

Essay Checklist

1. Essay Title

- ✓ Does the essay have the full and correct essay title?

2. Introduction

- ✓ Is there a significant introduction that identifies the topic, purpose and structure of the essay?
- ✓ Are key words or concepts identified in the introduction?

3. Main Body

- ✓ Is there plenty of evidence that you have done the required reading?
- ✓ Have you put each main point in a separate paragraph?
- ✓ Are the paragraphs logically linked?
- ✓ Is each main point/argument supported by evidence, argument or examples?
- ✓ Are the ideas of others clearly referenced?

4. Conclusion

- ✓ Is the conclusion directly related to the question?
- ✓ Is it based on evidence and facts?
- ✓ Does it summarise the main points?
- ✓ Is it substantial (a paragraph or more)?

5. References

- ✓ Have you referenced all of your sources?
- ✓ Are all of the references accurate?
- ✓ Are all of the references in the essay shown in the bibliography and vice versa?

6. Layout

- ✓ Is it neat and legibly presented?

What is an argument?

You may have come across the term 'argument' in an academic context and felt confused, not fully understanding its meaning. Outside of academia, 'argument' usually refers to a disagreement. It tends to be an event; a physical occurrence. This may be the sense of the word that is most familiar to you, but an 'academic argument' describes something quite different: it is essentially a point of view.

A good argument (a 'sound' argument) is a point of view that is presented in a clear and logical way, so that each stage of reasoning is transparent and convincing; it will include evidence and possible counter-arguments. It may even help to make the assumption that the reader is in disagreement with you.

You will not only find arguments of this kind in academic contexts. Whenever you read a paper, or watch TV, or listen to a friend, you are presented with an argument – a point of view that has been articulated with the express purpose of convincing you of its validity or truth. Almost anywhere where there is thought and communication, there is argument; although the same intellectual standards and formal structure that are imposed in an academic context may be absent. The editorial sections of quality newspapers are a particularly good place to look for arguments.

When constructing your argument, the first thing to do is to read the essay question, then read it again. What does it ask you to do? Assess? Evaluate? Discuss? Compare? Each of these 'question-words' is different. Make sure that your argument matches the question-word. Once you are certain of your point of view, start thinking about the kind of evidence that would stand up in court.

2. Parts of Speech

Each word in a sentence can be defined by the role it plays. The different roles are known as 'parts of speech'. In order to fully understand the examples in this booklet, it may help to re-familiarise yourself with the basic parts of speech.

Verb

A verb is the part of speech that people tend to identify most easily. In schools it is known as a 'doing word' – an action word – which describes what the nouns in the sentence are doing, i.e. swimming, walking, eating, thinking, growing, learning, drinking, misbehaving. In the sentence, 'Sam studies in the library', 'studies' is the verb.

Noun

A noun is an object – a thing – such as 'team', 'girl' or 'car'. A 'proper noun' is the *proper* name of the thing (if it has its own name) such as 'Colchester United', 'Nicole', or 'Porsche'. Proper nouns have a capital letter. This shows that what is being referred to is the *proper name* ('Porsche') rather than the common or collective name ('car').

Pronoun

A pronoun is a word that is used *in place of a noun*, such as 'he', 'she', 'it', 'him', 'her', etc. Its purpose is to avoid endless repetition of the noun while ensuring that none of the meaning of the sentence is lost. For example, the sentence, 'Abdul is punctual: he is always on time for his tutorials' is much better than 'Abdul is punctual: Abdul is always on time for Abdul's tutorials.'

Adjective

An adjective is a *describing word* that gives the noun a quality that makes it more specific. For example, any number of adjectives could be used to 'qualify' the noun 'lecture'. It could be an 'excellent lecture', a 'long lecture', or a 'boring lecture' – 'excellent', 'long' and 'boring' are all adjectives.

Adverb

An adverb is a describing word, but *for verbs*, not nouns. For example, 'quickly', 'stupidly' and 'hurriedly' are all adverbs (they often end in '–ly'). They are used with verbs to make the action more specific, e.g. 'drink quickly', 'behave stupidly', 'work hurriedly'. In the sentence, 'the lecturer shouted loudly', 'loudly' is the adverb.

Preposition

Prepositions are words that describe the *position* and movement of the nouns in a sentence, such as 'to', 'from', 'into', 'out', 'of', 'in'. They precede the noun, e.g. 'to the classroom', 'in the lecture'. For example, in the sentence, 'After being pushed into the lake, I was stuck in the water', 'in' and 'into' are both prepositions; 'in' describes a position, whereas 'into' describes movement.

3. Punctuation and Grammar

'Punctuation shouldn't cause as much fear as it does. Only about a dozen marks need to be mastered and the guidelines are fairly simple. What's more, you can see the marks being well applied every day in the serious newspapers.' Martin Cutts, *The Plain English Guide*, OUP, 1995, p.80

Although this section also covers grammar, misuse of punctuation is at the heart of many of the most common mistakes in writing. Good punctuation makes the relationship between words in a sentence clear, while also acting as a substitute for features of speech such as pausing and altering pitch and tone. Misusing punctuation can be like talking with a mouthful of food, obscuring and obstructing the intended meaning.

3.1. Bad syntax

'Syntax' is the technical word that is used to describe sentence structure. It is extremely important, as a well-ordered sentence makes meaning clear and concise, whereas a badly-ordered sentence makes the reader (and marker) work very hard to understand the meaning.

Student example: 'Although the current law for establishing whether something is a fixture or fitting can be argued to be rather messy and incoherent…'

In this sentence, the word order is, to use the author's own phrase, 'rather messy and incoherent'. A slight reordering, using the same vocabulary, makes the sentence much clearer and more logical: 'Although it could be argued that the current law for establishing whether something is a fixture or fitting is rather messy and incoherent…'

Playing around with syntax can transform your sentence. Think about the best way to order the key words and phrases. If you are struggling to make your meaning clear in a sentence, try changing the word order.

3.2. Inappropriate use of tense

Make sure you use the correct tense – and be consistent with it. When you are introducing and discussing other people's opinions, use the present tense, e.g. 'Mills believes' or 'Mills claims' rather than 'Mills believed' or 'Mills claimed'. By putting them in the past tense, their opinions seem dated; it also suggests that their views may have since changed. It may, however, be appropriate to use the past tense if the person in question has been dead a long time, or was writing in a different era.

Student example: 'A few years ago, Robert P. Crease asked physicians what they think is the most beautiful experiment of all time.'

In this sentence, the author shifts tense. It starts in the past tense ('A few years ago, Robert P. Crease asked *physicians…') then moves into the present tense ('… what* they think *is the most beautiful experiment of all time). As well as being confusing, the statement could also be inaccurate, as the physicians may have changed their minds since they were asked. All that can be said for certain is that the experiment they identified was what* they thought *was the most beautiful* at the time.

It is a common practice to use the future tense in introductory sections of essays, for example 'The purpose of this essay will be to explore…' or 'This essay will explore…'. The future tense can sound uncertain and unconfident, however: you can be more assertive by writing in the present tense, e.g. 'The purpose of this essay is to explore…' or 'This essay explores…'.

3.3. Incorrect use of prepositions

What are prepositions? Prepositions are words that describe the *position and movement* of the nouns in a sentence (see Parts of Speech to clarify your understanding). They are very easy to use incorrectly, because they often seem to *sound right* in a sentence. The secret is to step back and think about each one and whether it is describing the right position or movement.

Student example: 'We have disconnected ourselves with our fellow members of society and no longer know the neighbours around us. There are so many of us now that we seem to of lost a sense of community and become strangers on our society.'

In this example, the author has used the wrong preposition in a number of places. In the first part of the sentence, he or she has misunderstood the relationship between the subject ('ourselves') and the object ('fellow members of society') of the sentence: you cannot 'disconnect with', as 'with' means 'together', you can only disconnect 'from'.

In the second part of the sentence, the author has made a mistake that is common in conversation: using 'of' instead of 'have' (i.e. 'we seem to of lost' – of *sounds a bit like* 'ave*). If the author stripped the sentence down and took out the clause ('seem to') which has probably caused the confusion, the sentence would read 'There are so many of us now that we of lost a sense of community', which is more obviously incorrect. In the final part of the sentence, 'on' is used instead of 'in'.*

Correct use of prepositions shows clarity of thought and a good understanding of the relationships between everything that is described in the sentence. Think carefully about the position and movement of nouns in your sentences. Is so-and-so *in* or *on* this-or-that? Is this-or-that being taken *to* or *from* so-and-so?

3.4. Incorrect use of colons and semi-colons.

Colons and semi-colons may look and sound alike, but are actually very different. They can generally be avoided, so only use them if you are confident in your understanding.

Student example: 'This problem can also be seen in the following example; in a marriage both the man and the woman…'

In this sentence, the author has used a semi-colon where a colon should have been used. The aim of the punctuation mark is to join the two halves of the sentence together, which are: (i) a claim or statement ('This problem can also be seen in the following example') and (ii) the explanation, example or proof ('in a marriage both the man and the woman…'). Sometimes this use of a colon is referred to as a 'why-because' marker (Cutts, 1995: 83).

Semi-colons, on the other hand, are very different from colons. Any two statements (or clauses) that are separated by a semi-colon should (i) be able to stand alone as separate sentences, and (ii) be closely connected in terms of their subject matter. For example, 'There are a number of different uses for semi-colons; used in the right way, they can be extremely versatile'.

Crude as it may seem, the colon in the human body provides a very helpful analogy with the punctuation colon, particularly in the way it functions as a 'why-because marker' (note that colons can also be used

to introduce the following: a list of items; a contrast; and direct speech). Physiologically, the colon is the point at which one thing (here, food) becomes another (in this case waste). In the same way, a grammatical colon separates (A) the introduction of something, e.g. an idea or a claim, from (B) the explanation for that idea or claim.

3.5. Incorrect use of apostrophes

Apostrophes are perhaps the most misused punctuation mark of all. Described as 'errant tadpoles' (Cutts, 1995: 89), they can, if used incorrectly, completely obscure the intended meaning of a sentence.

Student example: 'The law does not specify other eventualities, such as a situation where a lost item falls onto a landowners land…'

In this sentence, 'landowners' should be 'landowner's', because the land belongs to the landowner. Apostrophes indicate ownership: 'the landowner's land' is another way of saying 'the land of the landowner'.

Correct use of the apostrophe shows clarity of thought and a good understanding of the relationship between the nouns in a sentence. Learn about apostrophes: they will help you to think more clearly and help your reader to understand and follow your argument better (see Further Reading). Remember the rule that the apostrophe generally goes before the 's' if the noun is singular (e.g. the dog's dinner meaning the dinner of the dog) and after the 's' if the noun is plural (dogs' dinner meaning the dinner of the dogs).

As well as indicating ownership, the other common use of apostrophes is to show that a letter is missing – that words have been 'contracted' – i.e. 'It's nothing to do with me' instead of 'It is nothing to do with me'; 'She's been a long time' instead of 'She has been a long time.' As a general rule, contractions should be avoided in academic work.

3.6. Incorrect use of speech marks

Speech marks 'do exactly what they say on the tin': they mark speech. Nonetheless, they are still one of the most misused punctuation marks.

Student example: 'In 'The End of Education', Nils (2004) states that "the only thing that can save the UK education system is a complete overhaul…'".

In this sentence, the author has used speech marks ("_") instead of inverted commas ('_'). In most disciplines speech marks should only be used when something is being said, not when something has been expressed in writing. The majority of quotations in academic work will therefore require inverted commas, not speech marks, though you should check the conventions of your discipline to confirm this.

The difference between speech marks (sometimes called 'double inverted commas') and inverted commas ('single inverted commas') is very simple. One way to distinguish them is to remember that speech requires the physical presence of two people, a speaker and a listener, hence it needs double inverted commas: "speech marks". When something is being referenced from a book, however, only one person is present (the reader) hence 'single inverted commas'.

'Most experienced writers rewrite their work over and over, refining their thoughts, finding a better way of saying something, making a long-winded section a bit briefer, or adding more detail to develop an idea.' (Cottrell 2003: 146)

3.7. Confusing singular and plural

Nouns always specify number, i.e. whether they are singular ('dog') or plural ('dogs'). As well as being consistent with the number, you must make sure that your verbs match your nouns (e.g. 'the dog swims' or 'the dogs swim').

Student example: 'The law of averages are too unreliable…'

In this sentence, the word 'law' is singular (i.e. one in number); if it is intended to be plural (more than one), it should be 'laws'. However, the author has used 'are', the plural form of the verb, instead of 'is', the singular (remember 'the laws are' and 'the law is'). Nouns and verbs must correspond. The confusion has probably arisen from 'averages' being plural, but it is 'law' to which the verb refers. It should be, 'The law of averages is too unrealiable...'.

3.8. Using unnecessary words

One of the most significant differences you will notice as your writing improves is a reduction in superfluous (i.e. unnecessary) words. The best and most precise writing is often the simplest, as the author is in full control of every word. Always ask yourself whether each word is necessary and whether it is the best word you could use.

Student example: 'Being poor in society today it does not cause as many problems for the individual as it did many years ago.'

In the first line of this sentence, the pronoun 'it' is used in the place of 'being poor' (a pronoun substitutes a noun; see Parts of Speech). However, its inclusion is superfluous because the reader does not need to be reminded of the subject of the sentence. 'It' would be necessary to start a new sentence in which 'being poor' is still the subject, but in a single sentence it is unnecessary and confusing.

3.9. Using inappropriate or informal phrases

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of informal modes of written communication, such as emailing, texting, and instant messaging. These have contributed to a rise in the number of informal phrases that appear in more formal writing, such as the essay.

Student example: 'In 'The Repressed Imagination' by C. Cartwright, one of the topics he talks about is…'

In this sentence, the verb 'talks' is inappropriate and incorrect, because 'talking' is a very different action to 'writing'.

Student example: 'Basically, the policy aims to improve the quality of the service…'

The word 'basically' is becoming increasingly common in essays, but is inappropriate in the context of academic writing, because the purpose is not to reduce things to their most basic form but to explore issues and ideas in their full complexity and detail. Making something 'basic' is different to summarising. Terms like 'in essence', 'to summarise', or 'in short' are far more academic in tone.

Think about your everyday speech. However well you may speak, much of what you say, and the phrases you use, will be inappropriate for formal written work. Using the word 'talk' as an umbrella term to refer to any kind of communication is just one example of this common mistake. Think carefully about the words you use: what might they be implying by accident?

3.10. Not starting new sentences when appropriate

If you are unsure whether or not to start a new sentence, you probably should, especially if you lack confidence with colons and semi-colons, which can be used to make more complex sentences. If in doubt, keep your sentences as simple as possible. There is a famous saying, attributed to Epictetus, the Greek philosopher:

Do not write so that you can be understood, write so that you cannot be misunderstood.

Student example: 'The graph shows the results, after fatigue the score is generally lower. There are some anomalies, there could be many different reasons for this.'

In this example, both sentences would be less confusing if they were separated into two statements, either by full stops or semi-colons i.e. 'The graph shows the results. After fatigue the score is generally lower. There are some anomalies. There could be many different reasons for this.' Alternatively, the sentences could be rephrased so that each statement flows into the next, i.e. 'The graph shows that after fatigue the score is generally lower. There are some anomalies, however, for which there could be many different reasons.'

Remember that a sentence should usually contain a single idea or argument; likewise, a paragraph should contain a single theme or focus. Pay close attention to where and how professional writers start new sentences. Learn how to use semi-colons, colons, and commas so that you can form more complex sentences.

3.11. Incorrect use of commas

In a nutshell, 'commas act as separators between parts of a sentence' (Cutts, 1995: 81). To this effect, they often need to be used in pairs. The following is just one example of how commas are misused (see Swan, 1996: 468-470 for a comprehensive list).

Student example: 'Private problems, Mills believes can often be resolved outside of court…'

There should be a pair of commas in this sentence, not a single comma. It should read 'Private problems, Mills believes, can often be resolved…'. 'Mills believes' is a separate 'clause' and needs to be separated so that the sentence makes sense with or without it. Cutts (1995: 82) explains this nicely: 'A pair of commas cordons off information that is an aside, explanation or addition. Readers can, if they wish, leapfrog the cordoned-off area and still make sense of what is said.'

3.12. Mixing pronouns

A 'pronoun' may sound like something technical and complex, but it is actually very simple (see Parts of Speech to clarify your understanding). Always make sure that your pronoun matches your noun. Is it the right number? Is it the right gender? Is it first, second, or third person?

Student example: 'Because society is changing so rapidly it is easy to understand why one may feel he cannot cope…'

In this sentence, the author mixes the pronouns, moving from 'one' to 'he', which is very confusing for the reader. A better sentence would be, 'Because society is changing so rapidly it is easy to understand why people feel that they cannot cope…'

3.13. Inappropriate use of definite article

One of the most confusing things about the English language for some international students is the 'definite article' – otherwise known as 'the' – because some languages do not have articles.

Student example: 'To find a sense of reason instead of drowning in the depths of confusion the society bestows upon us…'

In this sentence, the second occurrence of the definite article ('the' in 'the society') is superfluous.

Although correct use of the definite article is a common problem among international students, it is also increasingly common among home students. Learn the difference between the definite article ('the', e.g. 'the house') and the indefinite article ('a', 'some', e.g. 'a house' or 'some houses') – you can see why they are classed as indefinite or definite. Think carefully about whether you need to use one, the other, or neither.

3.14. Inappropriate or incorrect use of capital letters

Apart from in people's names, in titles, and at the beginning of sentences, capitals (big letters) should only be used if the word is a 'proper noun' rather than a common noun, i.e. if it is the official name or title for something (see Parts of Speech to clarify your understanding).

Student example: 'One day a teacher notices that the children start missing School and often arrive late…'

In this example, the author has used capital letters inappropriately. For example, in the case of school, the only time it should be given a capital letter is if its proper name is being referred to, i.e. Woodlands School, or if the reference is to a specific school. In the example, the author was not referring to a specific school. It is the same with the word 'department'. If, for example, you are referring specifically to your department, it should be 'Department of Psychology'. If you are referring to departments in general, it should be 'departments'.

Correct use of capital letters is quite easy to understand if you make the time to learn. Students often have trouble with capital letters in titles; of essays, publications, etc. However, there are set rules that are easy to learn and apply. Take the time. See Further Reading.

3.15. Using 'and' instead of 'to'

It is an increasingly common mistake to use 'and' instead of 'to', e.g. 'I want to try and learn a new skill' instead of 'I want to try to learn a new skill'. Objections to this particular mistake may seem irrelevant and old-fashioned, but it actually alters the meaning of the sentence.

Student example: 'One response of commissioners was to try and manage demand…'

In the example sentence, what the author actually means is 'to try to manage demand'. 'To try' is an infinitive verb (i.e. a 'to' verb) which needs an additional verb – in this case 'manage' – to qualify it. By using 'and' instead of 'to', the sentence is actually saying that there are two actions (two verbs) at work: the first action is 'trying'; the second action is 'managing'. Therefore, the sentence is effectively saying, 'One response of commissioners was to try and then to manage demand…'

3.16. Insufficient proof-reading

Always proof-read your work and always get someone else, such as a trusted friend, to proof-read it for you. Make sure you allow yourself enough time to do this effectively, i.e. leave a few days between readings so that you can read it with fresh eyes. Yes, this means doing your essays well before the deadlines…

Student example: 'Many problems relate directly to the lack of or lack of functioning institutions within society'.

Although this sentence makes sense, it could be misread as a mistake or typo (a 'typographical error'). The choice of phrasing ('lack of or lack of'), and the absence of commas to punctuate the phrase, make the sentence very confusing for the reader. A pair of commas clarifies meaning: 'Many problems relate directly to the lack of, or lack of functioning, institutions within society'.

Try to develop your ability to read your work with fresh and critical eyes. Empathise with your reader. It may help to read aloud to yourself; that way you can be hyper-sensitive to your punctuation, and test whether it helps or hinders the flow of your sentences.

mySkills

mySkills, the University's academic skills website, features advice, guidance, and interactive resources on all aspects of study. Developed as a joint initiative, everything that is housed within the site has been authored by expert academic and support staff from across the University. It has a large section on writing, featuring a short film in which students give their opinions and advice on essay writing.

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4. Reasoning

Aside from the grammatical errors listed in the previous section, the most common mistakes made by first-year students in their essays arise from poor practice and decision-making relating to reasoning, structure, argumentation, and presentation. These have been grouped together under the umbrella of Reasoning, but there is also a separate section on Structuring an Essay (p. 2).

4.1. Poor structure

The most common mistakes that students make in their academic writing relate to structure, and, if asked, many lecturers would say that the structure is the most important element of an essay: without a strong, well-considered and well-planned framework – without a blueprint – it can be extremely difficult to stay focused and develop your argument. In most cases, you should have a plan or an essay outline before you begin writing. However, it often helps to just get your head down and write. This is fine – and a healthy practice! – but always have an organising structure, whether this comes a bit later or before you even put pen to paper (or fingers to keys).

Read Structuring an Essay on (p. 2).

4.2. Poor referencing techniques

To write well-structured and well-argued essays, it is crucial that you develop your ability to introduce and discuss the opinions of experts in your field.

Student example: 'In Wright Mills, 'The Promise of Sociology', he identifies several different personal troubles…'

In this sentence, the use of 'in' is incorrect and the use of 'he' is superfluous. It should be 'Wright Mills, in 'The Promise of Sociology', identifies…' or 'In 'The Promise of Sociology', Wright Mills identifies…' The subject (the author) and the object (the book) have been confused: they are seen as one and the same.

NB. Check what the conventions are for your discipline – it may or it may not be necessary to include date and title, for example.

Put aside a few moments to learn and master some easy techniques for introducing a reference or citation that you can rely upon and develop as you gain in confidence. Pay attention to how professional writers and academics introduce references in the published work that you read.

Many techniques are simple to understand and apply. For example, one common way to introduce a reference is: 'AUTHOR, in TITLE, argues [or claims or asserts or states, etc.] that 'QUOTE'…' e.g.

> **Yates, in 'How to Improve Your Academic Writing', argues that 'the majority of people have never been encouraged or have never found a reason to get passionate about language' (2008: 2).**

4.3. Poor or unclear reasoning

Above all, perhaps the key to a successful essay is good reasoning, i.e. each sentence – and by extension each paragraph – flows logically into the next, building towards a well-reasoned and well-structured argument.

Student example: 'Different groups have different identities, ways of separating themselves from others. This leads to stereotypes. People misunderstand one another based on their appearance. This division between people is getting bigger and more problematic every day.'

Although this paragraph makes sense, a number of assumptions are made by the author, and the connection between each sentence is not always explicit, i.e. the sentences do not progress logically from one to the next.

Always check each sentence in relation to the sentence that precedes it to be certain that there is a direct relationship, and that the central idea continues to be developed.

4.4. Generalisations

Beware the generalisation! It is often tempting to get carried away and apply our idea or opinion to everything, but always be mindful of exceptions and counter-arguments.

Student example: 'Nowadays we are more able to examine ourselves from both a public and personal viewpoint. We were once dictated to, in our way of thinking, but now we are free.'

The author makes assumptions about time and place, both past and present, implying intellectual superiority over the past, and making a universalisation or generalisation about freedom of thought.

4.5. Speculations and assertions

If you are making a claim that could be disputed by the reader, make sure you use some kind of evidence to back it up.

Student example: 'Without the police force there would be anarchy on the streets and a huge increase in crime, which would result in more individuals being victims of crime.'

While this may be true, without evidence it is only speculative. It needs to be backed up with an example or research, e.g. when or where this was the case.

'Be emotionally neutral: most academic writing requires you to stand back and analyse dispassionately, as an objective onlooker.' (Cottrell 2003: 157)

If you are not sure of the difference between 'objective' and 'subjective', look them up. Objectivity is one of the cornerstones of academic practice.

4.6. Poor choice of vocabulary

Always check your vocabulary for appropriateness – and don't be afraid to use a dictionary. If you are using a word which has a number of different meanings and spellings, always look it up to check that you have used the correct form (see Commonly Confused Words, p. 18).

Student example: 'With some institutions becoming secular, such as religion and family…'

The choice of vocabulary in this sentence is poor, especially the use of 'secular' because 'religion' and 'secular' are opposites. Therefore, although religions can be disbanded or become defunct, they cannot become secular, as 'secular' means 'non-religious'. The sentence could be rephrased in a number of ways, e.g. 'With some institutions becoming defunct, such as religion and family …'.

4.7. Misusing or misquoting a well-known phrase

Only use phrases that you fully understand and know are appropriate in a piece of formal academic work.

Student example: 'The breakdown of the atomic family…'

The correct phrase is 'nuclear family', but it is easy to see how the mistake was made.

When possible, always get a trusted friend to read your work. I recently saw an advert for a car in which the seller claimed that, rather than it being 'reliable', his car was in 'good condition and very liable'.

4.8. Making indirect assumptions

Avoid making indirect assumptions. This can be difficult because it is not always obvious to us when we are being presumptuous, especially when we are trying to be open-minded…

Student example: 'Just because most tribes are uncivilised, it does not mean that there are no civilised tribes.'

Although the author intends to establish himself or herself as liberal and not presumptuous, the statement is premised on another assumption about 'most tribes' which is not backed up with data or literature. In addition, 'civilised' is also a problematic term to use because it is value-laden and subjective.

4.9. Inappropriate or inadvertent use of metaphor

In writing, we sometimes use metaphors without realising it. A 'metaphor' is the term for a literary technique in which something is described as being something else, for example, 'The moon was a ghostly galleon'. Metaphors are mostly deliberate and obvious; in the example, the metaphor reveals something more about the moon – it describes it, making it more vivid. However, sometimes poor choice of vocabulary can lead to an accidental metaphor…

Student example: 'We live in a time in which we are encouraged to question the world and its contents…'

Although the author may not have been fully conscious of this, he or she has used a metaphor that is inappropriate in the description of the 'world and its contents', as 'contents' usually refer to vessels or repositories, and the world is not a vessel.

5. Useful Tips

- ✓ In a nutshell, a good academic essay is *well-researched, well-structured, and well-argued*. However, you will only get a good mark if you answer the essay question (read the tip on p. 2). Similarly, if you have been allowed to chose the title yourself, make sure it is appropriate.

- ✓ Your target audience is an intelligent reader who does not know anything about the subject but may be familiar with the discipline and the main theories that are considered to be common knowledge.

- ✓ If you are expected to submit your work anonymously, *make sure you do!* However, make sure that you have identified yourself in the way that is preferred by your department, such as by student number, course code, etc. Make sure you are clear about this. Ask someone if necessary.

- ✓ The best academics usually have thick skins and have learnt not to take harsh reviews to heart (*Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 3-9 July 2008, p. 22); as a novice academic, it is the same for you. Feedback is intended to help you improve, so make the most of it; try not to rest on your laurels or get downhearted. Remember that the best writers work very closely with criticism and the editorial process (read the tip on p. 10).

- ✓ Make sure your work is presented in the house style specified by your department.

- ✓ ~~Don't use contractions~~. Do not use contractions. Write in full.

- ✓ Avoid using 'you' and 'your'. It sounds too informal.

- ✓ Avoid abbreviations. Again, write in full. Use 'for example' instead of 'e.g.', unless you are using e.g. or i.e. in parenthesis.

- ✓ If you are using acronyms (i.e. NASA) make sure you write it out in full the first time you use it (National Aeronautics and Space Administration).

Some tips from George Orwell
from 'Politics and the English Language'

Be clear about what you are saying
'A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus: What am I trying to say? What words will express it? What image or idiom will make it clearer? Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?'

Avoid using clichéd phrases
'Modern writing at its worst does not consist in picking out words for the sake of their meaning and inventing images in order to make the meaning clearer. It consists in gumming together long strips of words which have already been set in order by someone else.'

Avoid mixing metaphors: think
'The sole aim of a metaphor is to call up a visual image. When these images clash… it can be taken as certain that the writer is not seeing a mental image of the objects he is naming; in other words, he is not really thinking.'

6. Commonly Confused Words

A and *an* – whereas 'a' is used before a consonant sound (e.g. 'a boy', 'a party', 'a situation'), 'an' is used before a vowel sound, i.e. before a word that begins with the letter a, e, i, o, or u (e.g. 'an army', 'an old man'); some people also use 'an' before h, as it is considered to be a 'weak consonant'. It is easy to see the practical reason for putting an 'an' before a vowel: try saying 'a army' aloud – it's difficult!

Accept and *except* – 'to accept' means 'to receive' (e.g. 'he accepted the award'); 'except' means 'all but' (e.g. 'everyone except Peter went to the Summer Ball').

Affect and *effect* – 'affect' either refers to influence (e.g. 'his presence affected the whole class') or emotional response (e.g. 'he showed little affect'); 'effect' refers to result (e.g. 'he had some serious side effects').

Cite, *sight* and *site* – in the context of essays, 'cite' is the commonest of these three homophones (words which are pronounced the same but are spelt differently and have different meanings): 'to cite' means to quote or mention (e.g. 'citing references'); 'sight' refers to the ability to see (e.g. 'she had bad eye sight'); 'site' refers to a location (e.g. 'the building site').

Complement and *compliment* – 'complement' is used when something completes or finishes something else, or provides a balance (e.g. 'the wine complemented the meal'); a 'compliment' is an expression of praise (e.g. 'the lecturer complimented his work').

Than and *then* – 'than' is used in a comparison (e.g. 'Tim is faster than Tom'); 'then' refers to a point in time (e.g. 'it happened then').

There and *their* – 'there' refers to place (e.g. 'over there'); 'their' indicates possession (e.g. 'their pyjamas' – i.e. the pyjamas that belonged to them).

Beware the Spellchecker!

Although spellchecker facilities in programmes such as Microsoft Word can undoubtedly be very useful, they can also create problems, especially with words that are commonly confused, such as homophones (words that sound the same but are spelt differently). A sentence with the wrong 'there' or 'their', or with 'its' instead of 'it's', will go unnoticed because the word – although wrong – does exist within the language.

Make sure that your spellchecker is set to UK spelling, not American spelling, as there are a number of important differences. Whereas American English spells 'color', English spells 'colour'; American English tends to use 'z' in verbs (e.g. 'analyze'), while English uses 's' (e.g. 'analyse'). The following webpage may be helpful:

www2.gsu.edu/~wwwesl/egw/jones/differences.htm

Don't ignore the grammar check. When a word is underlined to indicate that there is something wrong with the grammar, click on it and take a moment to read the explanation. This is a good way to learn about grammar. Sometimes you can ignore the rule: you will know whether or not to take the advice once you've read the description.

7. Writing Support at Essex

mySkills

mySkills is the University's academic skills website. It features advice, guidance, and interactive resources on all aspects of study. Developed as a joint initiative, everything that is housed within the site has been authored by expert academic and support staff at the University. It has a large section on writing, featuring a short film in which students give their opinions and advice on writing essays.

Student Support

Student Support have a number of Study Strategies Tutors with expertise in academic skills who you can speak to by appointment. They also run 'Strategies for Study' workshops throughout the year, so look out for related publicity or visit the website (URL below). The same workshops are also run specifically for students with dyslexia or similar learning difficulties. Themes include:

- ✓ Using University guidance and resources to support independent learning; Planning and managing your time effectively
- ✓ Selective and wider reading; Note-taking formats; Referencing and Plagiarism
- ✓ When, how and who to ask for help; Peer study groups
- ✓ Keeping track of what works for you: reviewing, revising and enjoying your study

Workshops are generally scheduled on Wednesdays. Visit the website for up-to-date timetables and for more guidance and services.

www2.essex.ac.uk/stdsup/welfare/workshops.shtm

There are many, many services and opportunities on campus, so make sure you take advantage of them. Ask Student Support what's available.

Writing Fellows

The University is fortunate enough to have two Writing Fellows from the Royal Literary Fund who are available to give one-to-one advice on the practical aspects of writing, whether for academic purposes or for pleasure. The Fellows are based in the Department of Literature, Film, and Theatre Studies (LiFTS) in room 5A.223, but are available to students and staff from all departments, across all years of study. Go to room 5A.201 in the LiFTS Department to book an appointment.

Writing Group

If you are experiencing difficulties in writing or generally find the process difficult, even if you have no immediate assignment deadlines, the Writing Group offers a safe and non-judgemental environment in which to discuss writing. E-mail: writinggroup@essex.ac.uk

OWLs (Online Writing Labs)
There are a number of writing resources on the web that are very good, known as OWLs. These are three of the best. The OWL at Purdue was the original.

Bowling Green State University
www.bgsu.edu/offices/acen/writingctr/page29232.html

Purdue University
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/

Grammar Bytes

www.chompchomp.com/

8. Further Reading

You may find the following books helpful. Those with an asterisk (*) were used in compiling this booklet. Those with a hash (#) are strongly recommended.

Burchfield, R. W., *The New Fower's Modern English Usage*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996.

Butcher, J., *Copy-editing: The Cambridge handbook*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981.

Cook, C. K., *Line by Line: How to edit your own writing*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1985.

Cottrell, S., *The Study Skills Handbook*, Palgrave, 2nd edition, 2003. *

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Evans, H. (ed. Crawford, G.), *Essential English: For journalists, editors and writers,* Pimlico, 2nd revised edition, 2000.

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Hilton, C. & Hyder, M., *Getting to Grips with Punctuation and Grammar*, BPP (Letts Educational) Ltd, London, 1992.

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Partridge, E., *Usage and Abusage: A guide to good English*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 6th edition, 1965.

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Swan, M., *Practical English Usage*, Oxford University Press, 2nd edition, 1995. *

Truss, L., *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*, Profile Books, 2007. * #

The Economist, *Pocket Style Book*, Economist Publications, London, 1986. #

The University of Chicago Press, *A Manual of Style*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 12th edition, 1969.

Designed and printed by University of Essex Printing Services © 2008

Produced by the Learning and Teaching Unit. Printed on recycled paper.

If you have questions regarding the booklet, please contact Richard Yates.

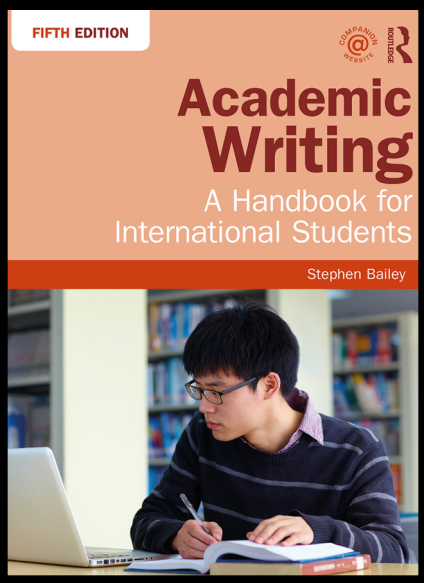
A ROUTLEDGE FREEBOOK

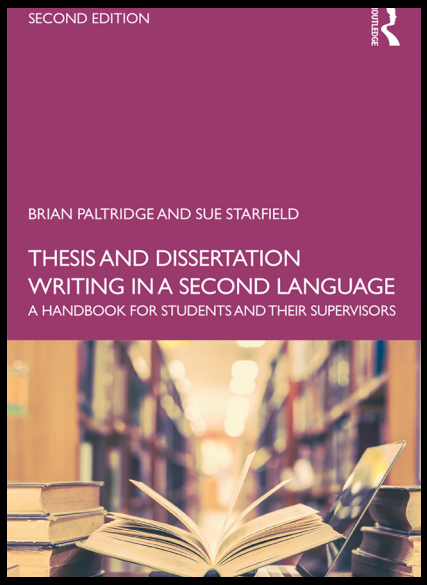
A Practical Guide to Academic Writing for International Students

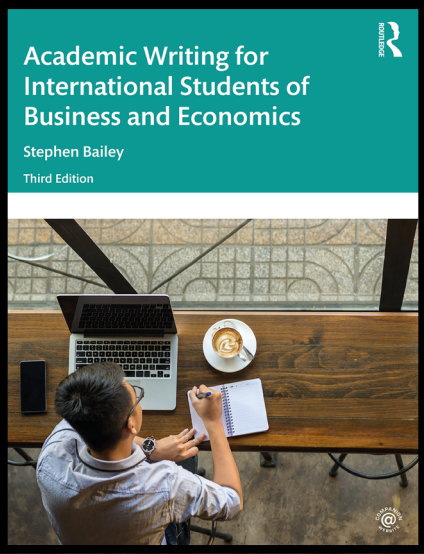
Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

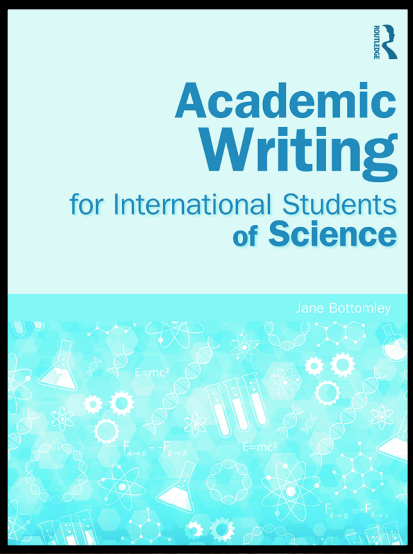
TABLE OF CONTENTS

READ THE LATEST ON ACADEMIC WRITING FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS WITH THESE KEY TITLES









VISIT WWW.ROUTLEDGE.COM

TO BROWSE FULL RANGE OF ACADEMIC WRITING TITLES

Introduction

Writing essays and dissertations can be a significant challenge for many international students studying at English-language universities. To help instructors support their students in this demanding task, we have put together some key chapters from leading titles in the field of Academic Writing for non-native English speakers.

The first three chapters, by Stephen Bailey, give a brief overview of the basics of Academic Writing and explain to international students how to create well-structured paragraphs and write effective introductions and clear conclusions.

The next chapter, by Jane Bottomley, explores the main features of academic scientific style and the notion of good academic practice in relation to the use of sources. It also presents some strategies for paraphrasing and summarizing which will help students to use academic sources in a positive way.

Chapters five, six and seven, again written by Stephen Bailey, provide international Business and Economics students some handy tips that will help them to succeed in writing their case studies, essays, reports and executive summaries.

The final chapter by Brian Paltridge and Sue Starfield, discusses four clusters of issues which can directly impact on second language speakers writing a thesis or dissertation in English and provide some useful tips to overcome them.

We hope you enjoy reading through these selected chapters, be sure to click through and learn more about each title. Each chapter is just a small sample of our content, **visit our website** to find out more about the books these are excerpted from and to browse our full selection of books in this area.

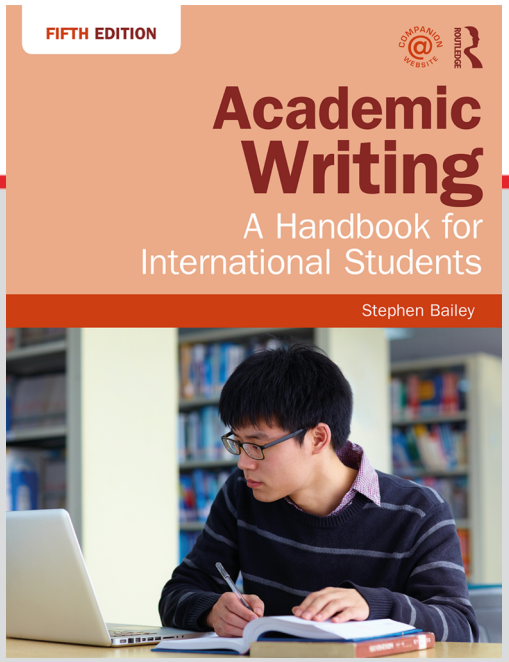
Note to the readers

References from the original chapters have not been included in this text. For a fully-referenced version of each chapter, including footnotes, bibliographies, references and endnotes, please see the published title. Links to purchase each specific title can be found on the first page of each chapter. As you read through this Freebook, you will notice that some excerpts reference previous chapters, please note that these are references to the original text and not the Freebook.

CHAPTER

1

BASIC OF WRITING



This chapter is excerpted from

Academic Writing: A Handbook for International Students

by Stephen Bailey.

Learn more

BASIC OF WRITING

Excerpted from *Academic Writing: A Handbook for International Students*

Most academic courses test students through written assignments. These tasks include coursework, which may take weeks to write, and exam answers, which often have to be written in an hour. This unit deals with:

- The names of different writing tasks
- The format of long and short writing tasks
- The structure of sentences and paragraphs

1 The purpose of academic writing

Students should be clear why they are writing. The most common reasons include:

- 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 synthesise research done by others on a topic

■ ***Can you suggest any other reasons?***

2 Features of academic writing

Although there is no fixed standard of academic writing, and style may vary from subject to subject, academic writing is clearly different from the written style of newspapers or novels.
For example, it is generally agreed that academic writing attempts to be accurate, so that instead of 'the metal was very hot' it is better to write 'the metal was heated to 65°C'. What are some of the features of academic writing?

■ ***Working alone or in a group, list your ideas here.***

BASIC OF WRITING

3 Common types of academic writing

The main types of written work produced by students are presented in the following table.

- ***Match the terms on the left to the definitions on the right.***

Notes	A piece of research, either individual or group work, with the topic chosen by the student(s).
Report	The longest piece of writing normally done by a student (20,000+ words) often for a higher degree, on a topic chosen by the student
Project	**A written record of the main points of a text or lecture, for a student's personal use.**
Essay	A general term for any academic essay, report, presentation or article
Dissertation/Thesis	A description of something a student has done (e.g. conducting a survey or experiment).
Paper	The most common type of written work, with the title given by the teacher, normally 1,000–5,000 words.

4 The format of short and long writing tasks

Short essays (including exam answers) generally have this pattern:

- **Introduction**
- **Main body**
- **Conclusion**

Longer essays and reports may include:

- **Introduction**
- **Main body**
- **Literature review**
- **Case study**
- **Discussion**
- **Conclusion**

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- **References**
- **Appendices**

Dissertations and journal articles may have:

- **Abstract**
- **List of contents**
- **List of tables**
- **Introduction**
- **Main body**
- **Literature review**
- **Case study**
- **Findings**
- **Discussion**
- **Conclusion**
- **Acknowledgments**
- **Notes**
- **References**
- **Appendices**

In addition to these sections, books may also include:

- **Foreword**
- **Preface**
- **Bibliography/Further reading**

- ***Discuss the meanings of the preceding terms.***
- ***Match the following definitions to terms in the preceding lists:***

a) A short summary which explains the paper's purpose and main findings.
b) A list of all the sources the writer has mentioned in the text.
c) A section, after the conclusion, where additional information is included.
d) A short section where people who have helped the writer are thanked.
e) Part of the main body in which the views of other writers on the topic are discussed.
f) A section where one particular example is described in detail.

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g) A preliminary part of a book usually written by someone other than the author.

ACADEMIC JOURNALS

There are thousands of academic journals published in English and other languages around the world. The purpose of these journals is to provide a forum for academics within a specific discipline (e.g. education or civil engineering) to share cutting-edge research. Most journals publish several issues a year and are often available either online or in a hard copy.

One important feature of journals is that the articles they publish are generally peer-reviewed. This means that when an article is submitted the editors ask other specialists in that field to read the article and decide if it is worth publishing. Reviewers may make comments that lead to the article being modified.

Students need to get to know the leading journals in their subject, which are generally available via the university library.

5 The components of academic writing

There are no fixed rules for the layout of written academic work. Different schools and departments require students to follow different formats in their writing. Your teachers may give you guidelines, or you can ask them what they want, but some general patterns apply to most formats for academic writing.

■ ***Read the following text and identify the features underlined, using the words in the box.***

sentence	**heading**	**subtitle**	**paragraph**	**title**	**phrase**

a) **A Fishy Story**
b) Misleading health claims regarding omega-3 fatty acids
c) Introduction
d) There has been considerable discussion recently about the benefits of omega-3 fatty acids in the diet.
e) It is claimed that these reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and may even combat obesity. Consequently food producers have added omega-3s to products ranging from margarine to soft drinks in an attempt to make their products appear healthier and hence increase sales.

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f) However, consumers may be unaware that there are two types of omega-3. The best (long-chain fatty acids) are derived from fish, but others (short-chain fatty acids) come from cheaper sources such as soya. This latter group have not been shown to produce the health benefits linked to the long-chain variety. According to Tamura et al. (2009), positive results may only be obtained either by eating oily fish three times a week, or by taking daily supplements containing 500mg of eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) or docosahexaenoic acid (DHA).

(Source: Health Concerns, March 2016, p. 17)

a) Title b) c) d) e) f)

6 Some other common text components

a) Reference to sources using **citation**: *According to Tamura et al. (2009)*

b) The use of **abbreviations** for convenience: *docosahexaenoic acid (DHA)*

c) **Italics**: used to show words from other languages or add emphasis: Medical research companies know *ex ante* that these citizens cannot afford medicines. (= Latin for 'before the event')

d) **Brackets:** used to give extra information or to clarify a point: *. . but others (short-chain fatty acids) come from cheaper sources such as soya.*

7 Simple and longer sentences

- ***Study the following table.***

Dragon Motors – vehicle production 2013–17

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
135,470	156,935	164,820	159,550	123,075

All sentences contain verbs:

*In 2013 the company **produced** over 135,000 vehicles.*
*Between 2013 and 2014 vehicle production **increased** by 20%.*

Simple sentences (such as the examples just given) are easier to write and read,

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but longer sentences are also needed in academic writing. However, students should make clarity a priority and avoid writing very lengthy sentences with several clauses until they feel confident in their ability.
Sentences containing two or more clauses use **conjunctions, relative pronoun**s or **punctuation** to link the clauses:

- *In 2013 Dragon Motors produced over 135,000 vehicles, **but** the following year production increased by 20%. (conjunction)*
- *In 2015 the company built 164,820 vehicles, **which** was the peak of production. (relative pronoun)*
- *Nearly 160,000 vehicles were produced in 2016**;** by 2017 this had fallen to 123,000. (punctuation– semicolon)*

■ ***Write two simple and two longer sentences using data from the following table***

Borchester College: gender balance by faculty, 2016 (percentages)

	Law	**Education**	**Engineering**	**Business**	**Computer sciences**
Male	43	22	81	41	65
Female	57	78	19	59	35

8 Writing in paragraphs

■ ***Discuss the following questions:***

What is a paragraph?

Why are texts divided into paragraphs?

How long are paragraphs?

Do paragraphs have a standard structure?

■ ***Read the following text and divide it into a suitable number of paragraph***s.

BASIC OF WRITING

BIOCHAR

Charcoal is produced by burning wood slowly in a low-oxygen environment. This material, which is mainly carbon, was used for many years to heat iron ore to extract the metal. But when in 1709 Abraham Darby discovered a smelting process using coke (produced from coal) demand for charcoal collapsed. At approximately the same time the carbon dioxide level in the atmosphere began to rise. But a new use for charcoal, renamed biochar, has recently emerged. It is claimed that using biochar made from various types of plants can both improve soil quality and combat global warming. Various experiments in the United States have shown that adding burnt crop wastes to soil increases fertility and cuts the loss of vital nutrients such as nitrates. The other benefit of biochar is its ability to lock CO2 into the soil. The process of decay normally allows the carbon dioxide in plants to return to the atmosphere rapidly, but when transformed into charcoal this may be delayed for hundreds of years. In addition, soil containing biochar appears to release less methane, a gas which contributes significantly to global warming. American researchers claim that widespread use of biochar could reduce global CO2 emissions by over 10%. But other agricultural scientists are concerned about the environmental effects of growing crops especially for burning, and about the displacement of food crops that might be caused. However, the potential twin benefits of greater farm yields and reduced greenhouse gases mean that further research in this area is urgently needed.

(Source: Ronzoni, M. (2013) *Farming Futures*, p. 154)

9 Practice

- ***Write two simple and two longer sentences on biochar.***

  a)

  b)

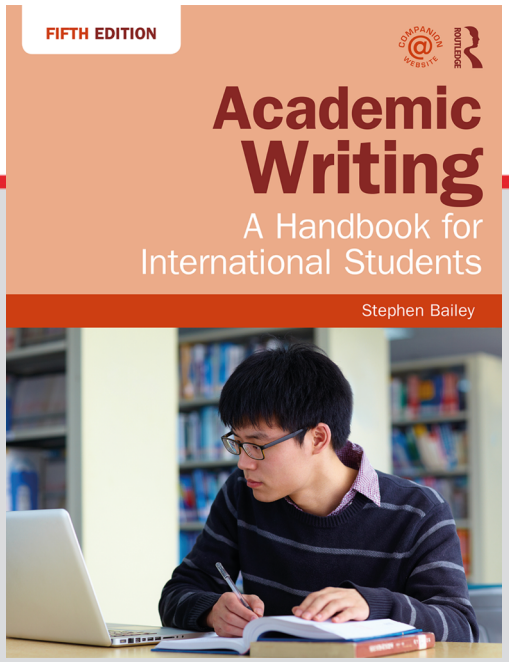
  c)

  d)

CHAPTER

2

ORGANISING PARAGRAPHS



This chapter is excerpted from

Academic Writing: A Handbook for International Students

by Stephen Bailey.

Learn more

ORGANISING PARAGRAPHS

Excerpted from *Academic Writing: A Handbook for International Students*

Paragraphs are the basic building blocks of academic writing. Well-structured paragraphs help the reader understand the topic more easily by dividing up the argument into convenient sections. This unit looks at:

- the components of paragraphs
- the way the components are linked together
- the linkage between paragraphs in the overall text

1 Paragraph structure

■ ***Read the following paragraph and answer the questions.***

Spanish is one of the world's leading languages. It is spoken by over 500 million people, mainly in Spain and Central and South America, as a first or second language.

This is a result of the growth of the Spanish colonies in Central and South America from the sixteenth century. Increasingly, Spanish is also widely used in North America, where Spanish language newspapers and radio stations are common. Spanish is a Romance language which evolved from Latin, but which also contains many words from Arabic, due to the historical Moorish presence in the Iberian peninsula.

a) What is the topic of this paragraph?

b) How are the sentences in the paragraph linked together?

ORGANISING PARAGRAPHS

The paragraph can be analysed thus:

1 Topic sentence	Spanish is one of the world's leading languages.
2 Supporting information	**It** is spoken by over 500 million people, mainly in Spain and Central and South America, as a first or second language.
3 Reason	**This** is a result of the growth of the Spanish colonies in Central and South America from the sixteenth century.
4 Extra information 1	**Increasingly,** Spanish is also widely used in North America, where Spanish language newspapers and radio stations are common.
5 Extra information 2	Spanish is a Romance language which evolved from Latin, **but** which also contains many words from Arabic, due to the historical Moorish presence in the Iberian peninsula.

This example shows that:

I. A paragraph is a group of sentences which deal with a single topic. Dividing up the text into paragraphs helps both writer and reader to follow the argument more clearly.
II. The length of paragraphs varies significantly according to text type, but should normally be no less than four or five sentences.
III. Usually (but not always) the first sentence introduces the topic. Other sentences may give definitions, examples, extra information, reasons, restatements and summaries.
IV. The parts of the paragraph are linked together by the reference words, conjunctions and adverbs shown in bold in the table. They guide the reader through the arguments presented.

ORGANISING PARAGRAPHS

2 Practice A

- ***The sentences in the following paragraph on the topic of home ownership have been mixed up. Use the table to put them in the right order.***

I. The reasons for this variation appear to be more cultural and historical than economic, since high rates are found in both rich and poorer countries.
II. There appears to be no conclusive link between national prosperity and the number of home owners.
III. Both the US and Britain have similar rates of about 65%.
IV. The rate of home ownership varies widely across the developed world.
V. Germany, for instance, has one of the lowest rates, at 52%, while in Spain it is much higher, 78%.

Topic sentence	
Example 1	
Example 2	
Reason	
Summary	

3 Practice B

- ***Read the next paragraph from the same essay and answer the questions that follow***

Despite this, many countries encourage the growth of home ownership. Ireland and Spain, for instance, allow mortgage payers to offset payments against income tax. It is widely believed that owning your own home has social as well as economic benefits. Compared to renters, home owners are thought to be more stable members of the community who contribute more to local affairs. In addition, neighborhoods of owner occupiers are considered to have less crime and better schools. But above all, home ownership encourages saving and allows families to build wealth.

ORGANISING PARAGRAPHS

- ***Analyse the paragraph using the table, giving the function of each sentence***

Topic sentence	Despite this, many countries encourage the growth of home ownership

- ***Underline the words and phrases used to link the sentences together.***
- ***Which phrase is used to link this paragraph to the one before?***

4 Introducing paragraphs and linking them together

The paragraph in Practice B begins with a phrase which links it to the previous paragraph in order to maintain continuity of argument:

Despite this (i.e. the lack of a conclusive link)

In order to begin a new topic you may use phrases such as:

Turning to the issue of child labour . . .
Rates of infection must also be examined . . . .
Inflation is another area for consideration . . .

Paragraphs can also be introduced with adverbs:

Traditionally, few examples were . . .
Finally, the performance of . . .
Currently, there is little evidence of . . .
Originally, most families were . . .

ORGANISING PARAGRAPHS

5 Practice C

- ***Use the following notes to write two paragraphs on the subject of 'Trams'. Use conjunctions and other suitable phrases to introduce and link the paragraphs together.***

  • Trams (streetcars in the US) first developed in late 19th century
  • Provided cheap and convenient mass transport in many cities
  • Rail-based systems expensive to maintain
  • Fixed tracks meant system was inflexible
  • During 1950s and 1960s many European and Asian cities closed tram systems
  • Today trams becoming popular again
  • Some cities (e.g. Paris and Manchester) building new systems
  • Trams less polluting than cars and cheaper to operate
  • Problems remain with construction costs and traffic congestion blocking tracks
  • Expense of building modern tramways means that they remain controversial

6 Practice D

- ***Use the information in the following table and graph to write a paragraph on 'UK rainfall in 2016'.***

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Overall
159	145	94	121	90	143	110	97	98	44	95	71	105

ORGANISING PARAGRAPHS

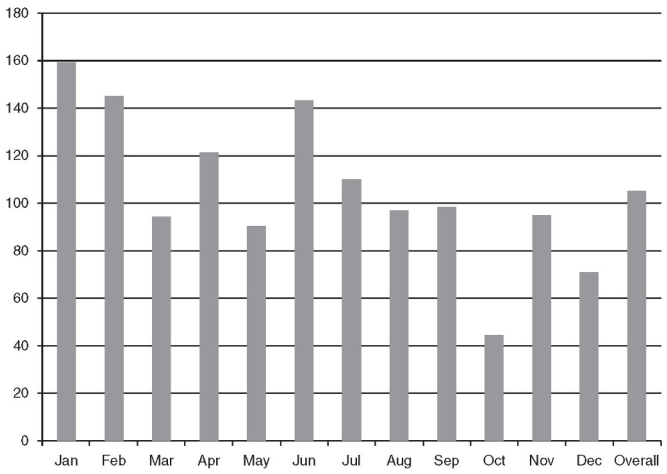
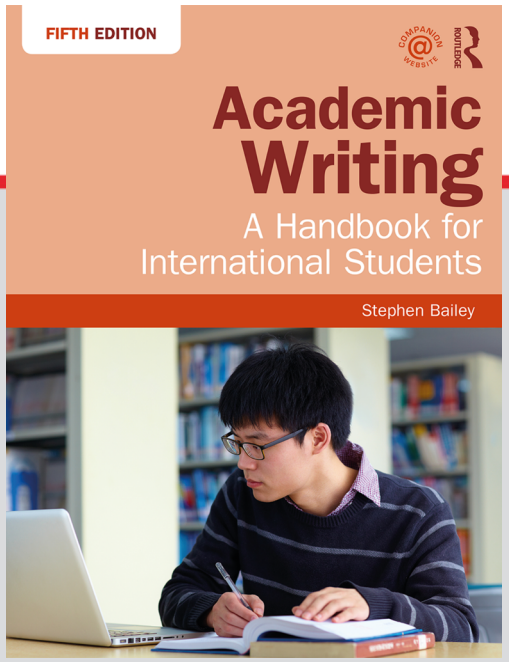


Figure 1 UK rainfall anomalies 2016 (percent of average monthly rainfall 1960–1989)
Source: The Met Office

CHAPTER

3

INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS



This chapter is excerpted from

Academic Writing: A Handbook for International Students

by Stephen Bailey

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INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

An effective introduction explains the purpose, scope and methodology of the paper to the reader. The conclusion should provide a clear answer to any questions asked in the title, as well as summarising the main points under discussion. With coursework, it may be better to write the introduction after writing the main body.

1 Introduction components

Introductions are usually no more than about 10% of the total length of an assignment. Therefore in a 2,000-word essay the introduction would be approximately 200 words.

- ***What components are normally found in an essay introduction? Choose from the following list.***

Components	**Y/N**
i) A definition of any unfamiliar terms in the title	
ii) Your personal opinions on the subject of the essay	
iii) Mention of some sources you have read on the topic	
iv) A provocative idea or question to interest the reader	
v) A suitable quotation from a famous authority	
vi) Your aim or purpose in writing	
vii) The method you adopt to answer the question	
viii) Some background or context of the topic	
ix) Any limitations you set yourself	
x) An outline of the main body	

INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

- ***Read the following extracts from introductions to articles and decide which of the components listed above (i – x) they are examples of.***

A) In the past 20 years the ability of trial juries to assess complex or lengthy cases has been widely debated.

B) The rest of the paper is organised as follows. The second section explains why corporate governance is important for economic prosperity. The third section presents the model specification and describes the data and variables used in our empirical analysis. The fourth section reports and discusses the empirical results. The fifth section concludes.

C) We attempted to test our hypothesis by comparing the reactions of a random sample of postgraduates with a group of first-year students.

D) There is no clear empirical evidence sustaining a 'managerial myopia' argument. Pugh et al. (1992) find evidence that supports such a theory, but Meulbrook et al. (1990), Mahoney et al. (1997), Garvey and Hanka (1999) and a study by the Office of the Chief Economist of the Securities and Exchange Commission (1985) find no evidence.

E) 'Social cohesion' is usually defined in reference to common aims and objectives, social order, social solidarity and the sense of place attachment.

F) This study will focus on mergers in the media business between 2000 and 2010, since with more recent examples an accurate assessment of the consequences cannot yet be made.

G) The purpose of this paper is to investigate changes in the incidence of extreme warm and cold temperatures over the globe since 1870.

2 Introduction structure

There is no standard pattern for an introduction, since much depends on the type of research you are conducting and the length of your work, but this is a common structure:

a) Definition of key terms, if needed
b) Relevant background information
c) Review of work by other writers on the topic

INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

d) Purpose or aim of the paper
e) Your research methods
f) Any limitations you imposed
g) An outline of your paper

- ***Study the introduction to an essay entitled 'Evaluate the experience of e-learning for students in higher education'.***

> There are a range of definitions of this term, but in this paper 'e-learning' refers to any type of learning situation where content is delivered via the internet. Learning is one of the most vital components of the contemporary knowledge-based economy. With the development of computing power and technology the internet has become an essential medium for knowledge transfer. Various researchers (Webb and Kirstin, 2003; Honig*et al.*, 2006) have evaluated e-learning in a healthcare and business context, but little attention so far has been paid to the reactions of students in higher education (HE) to this method of teaching. The purpose of this study was to examine students' experience of e-learning in an HE context.
>
> A range of studies was first reviewed and then a survey of 200 students was conducted to assess their experience of e-learning. Clearly a study of this type is inevitably restricted by various constraints, notably the size of the student sample, which was limited to students of Pharmacy and Agriculture. The paper is structured as follows. The first section presents an analysis of the relevant research, focusing on the current limited knowledge regarding the student experience. The second part presents the methodology of the survey and an analysis of the findings, and the final section considers the implications of the results for the delivery of e-learning programmes.

- ***Underline the following sections (a-g) of the introduction above:***

a) Definition

Certain words or phrases in the title may need clarifying because they are not widely understood or are used in a special sense.

b) Context

INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

It is useful to remind the reader of the wider context of your work. This may also show the value of the study you have carried out.

c) Reference to other researchers

While a longer article may have a separate literature review, in a shorter essay it is still important to show familiarity with researchers who have studied this topic previously. This may also reveal a gap in research which justifies your work.

d) Aim

The aim of your research must be clearly stated so the reader knows what you are trying to do.

e) Method

The method demonstrates the process that you undertook to achieve the given aim.

f) Limitations

You cannot deal with every aspect of this topic in an essay, so you must make clear the boundaries of your study.

g) Outline

Understanding the structure of your work will help the reader to follow your argument.

3 Opening sentences

It can be difficult to start writing an essay, but especially in exams, hesitation will waste valuable time. The first few sentences should be general but not vague in order to help the reader focus on the topic. They often have the following pattern:

Time phrase	Topic	Development
Currently,	the control of water resources	has emerged as a potential cause of international friction
Since 2008	electric vehicles	have become a serious commercial proposition.
Before 1950	antibiotic drugs	were not widely available.

INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

It is important to avoid opening sentences which are over-general and vague.

Compare:

Nowadays there is a lot of competition among different news providers. ***X***

In the last 20 years newspapers have faced strong competition from the internet for news and entertainment. ***V***

- ***Working quickly, write introductory sentences for three of the following titles.***

  a) How important is it for companies to have women as senior managers?

  b) Are there any technological solutions to global warming?

  c) What can be done to reduce infant mortality in developing countries?

  d) Compare the urbanisation process in two contrasting countries.

4 Conclusions

Conclusions tend to be shorter and more varied in format than introductions. Some articles may have a 'summary' or 'concluding remarks'. But student papers should generally have a final section which summarises the arguments and makes it clear to the reader that the original question has been answered.

- ***Which of the following are generally acceptable in conclusions?***

  a) A statement showing how your aim has been achieved.

  b) A discussion of the implications of your research.

  c) Some new information on the topic not mentioned before.

  d) A short review of the main points of your study.

  e) Some suggestions for further research.

  f) The limitations of your study.

  g) Comparison with the results of similar studies.

  h) A quotation which appears to sum up your work.

INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

- ***Match the following extracts from conclusions with the preceding acceptable features of conclusions. Example: a = vi***

  i) As always, this investigation has a number of limitations to be considered in evaluating its findings.

  ii) These results suggest that the risk of flooding on this coast has increased significantly and is likely to worsen.

  iii) Several hurdles that we encountered provide a point of departure for subsequent studies.

  iv) Our review of 13 studies of strikes in public transport demonstrates that the effect of a strike on public transport ridership varies and may either be temporary or permanent.

  v) These results of the Colombia study reported here are consistent with other similar studies conducted in other countries (Baron and Norman, 1992).

  vi) This study has clearly illustrated the drawbacks to family ownership of retail businesses.

5 Conclusion structure

Although there is no fixed pattern, a common structure for an essay conclusion is:

a) Summary of main findings or results

b) Link back to the original question to show it has been answered

c) Reference of the limitations of your work (e.g. geographical)

d) Suggestions for future possible related research

e) Comments on the implications of your research

6 Practice

- ***The following sentences form the conclusion to the essay titled 'Evaluate the experience of e-learning for students in higher education', whose introduction was given on page 78. The sentences have been mixed up. Put them into a logical order (1–5).***

  a) This finding was clear, despite the agreed convenience of e-learning.

  b) Given the constraints of the small and limited sample, there is clearly

INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

room for further research in this field, in particular to explore whether certain disciplines are more suited to this mode of learning than others.

c) However, our survey of nearly 200 students found a strong preference for traditional classroom teaching.

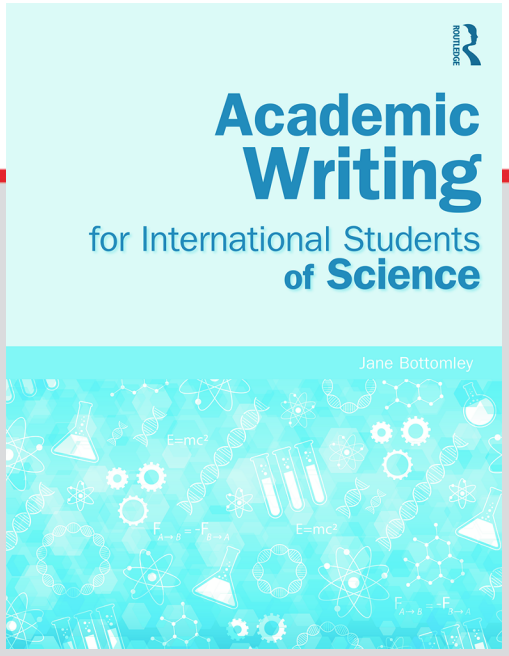
d) But in general it would appear that e-learning is unlikely to be acceptable as a primary teaching method in higher education.

e) This study found that little relevant research on the HE student experience of e-learning has been conducted, and the research that has been reported indicates a mixed reaction to it.

CHAPTER

4

ACADEMIC SCIENTIFIC STYLE



This chapter is excerpted from

Academic Writing for International Students of Science

by Jane Bottomley

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ACADEMIC SCIENTIFIC STYLE

Excerpted from *Academic Writing for International Students of Science*

This chapter will help you to become familiar with the features of good academics scientific style, focussing firstly on the importance of clarity, and secondly on the language and conventions associated with the style of writing.

3.1 Clarity

[N]o one who has something original or important to say will willingly run the risk of being misunderstood; people who write obscurely are either unskilled in writing or up to mischief.

(Peter Medawar, 1974, in Dawkins, 2008: 183)

Although the scientific content of a text may be complex and difficult to understand, the text itself should be as clear and readable as possible. Many factors contribute to clarity, some of which are covered in other parts of the book. In this chapter, you will focus on sentence length, text organisation, and being concise and precise.

3.1.1 Sentence length and text organisation

Sentence length and text organisation can greatly affect clarity.

Explorative Task

- ***Read the two texts. Which one is easier to read? Match the texts to one of the descriptions in the table which follows to help you think about why this might be.***

  Text A

  Telecommunications engineering is a discipline that brings together electrical engineering and computer science in order to enhance telecommunications systems. The work involved ranges from basic circuit design to strategic mass developments. The work of a telecommunications engineer includes designing and overseeing the installation of telecommunications equipment such as complex electronic switching systems, copper wire telephone facilities and fibre optics.

  Text B

  The discipline of telecommunications engineering, including the designing and installation overseeing of telecommunications equipment and facilities, such as complex electronic switching systems, copper wire telephone facilities and fibre optics, is the enhancement of telecommunication systems through the bringing

ACADEMIC SCIENTIFIC STYLE

together of electrical engineering and computer science, from basic circuit design to strategic mass developments.

1) Text _____	**2) Text _____**
is one very long sentence.	is broken up into shorter sentences.
has only one main verb. (Underline this).	has three sentences, each with a main verb (underline these).
gives a general definition near the end of the text, after specific details and examples have been given.	begins with a general definition, followed by specific details and examples.

Study box: long or short sentences?
It is sometimes thought that using very long sentences automatically makes a text 'sound more academic', but this is not necessarily the case. Short sentences can be used to good effect in scientific writing as they can convey information very clearly. Long sentences can also be useful as they allow you to combine information efficiently. But remember that any long sentences used must be carefully controlled (**Chapters 4** and **5**), and not become a string of loosely connected words and phrases.

Most scientific writing is usually a combination of long and short sentences

Many other factors contribute to clarity:

- **Chapter 2** to find out about the importance of engaging with the writing process to clarify thinking and expression
- **Chapters 4** and **5**, which focus on the importance of using good sentence structure to achieve clear expression; note the focus on precise punctuation
- **Chapters 6** and **8**, which explain how to develop clear paragraphs and texts; note the focus on punctuation
- **Chapter 9** to look at how following the conventions of academic and scientific

ACADEMIC SCIENTIFIC STYLE

writing can help to make a text easier to follow

Practice

- ***Rewrite this text so that it is clearer.***

Paediatrics is a branch of medicine that deals with the care of infants, children and adolescents, the main differences between paediatric and adult medicine being the differences in physiology and legal status, with children unable to make decisions for themselves. Paediatricians usually deal with children from birth to eighteen years of age.

--> *Model Text 2, Appendix 4*

3.1.2 Being concise

Clear scientific language is concise; wordiness and redundancy can be distracting and confusing for the reader and are often a sign that the writer is not in full control of the development of ideas in a text.

Practice (i)

- ***Rewrite these sentences to make them more concise.***

1) All of the studies had limitations.

2) Scientists need to find solutions to solve these problems.

3) He makes a comparison of both the two systems.

4) In the conclusion part of the chapter, she reiterates the importance and significance of the results.

5) Pollution is a global problem throughout the world.

Practice (ii)

- ***Look at the student's first draft and the lecturer's comments which follow.***

A number of technological methods of extraction of copper are available, which include hydrometallurgy, solvent extraction, liquid-liquid electrochemistry and electrowinning. Liquid–liquid electrochemistry is the focus of this project. Each of these processes is described below and liquid–liquid electrochemistry is given greater consideration as it is the focus of this project.

Accurate and well expressed – could be more concise, however.

ACADEMIC SCIENTIFIC STYLE

- ***Rewrite the text so that it is clear and concise.***
- ***Compare your text with the student's second draft . --> Model Text 3, Appendix 4***

3.1.3 Being precise

Writing should be concise, but, at the same time, it should be precise and explicit in meaning, avoiding vague expression or ambiguity.

Study Box: Precision in writing

1) Avoid using etc. or and so on. Use *such as* instead, when you want to give just two or three examples,

e.g. cancer, diabetes, etc. --> diseases **such as** cancer and diabetes

2) Avoid vague use of words, particularly prepositions; instead, use common collocations (words which often go together) and fixed phrases with precise meaning, e.g.

For applications, nanotechnology has huge potential.

--> **In terms of** applications, nanotechnology has huge potential.

There are a number of factors of climate.

--> There are a number of **factors affecting** climate.

There are many problems of excessive alcohol consumption.

-->There are many **problems associated with** excessive alcohol consumption.

(= problems that arise when someone consumes too much alcohol)

Compare with:

the problem of excessive alcohol consumption

(= excessive alcohol consumption is a problem)

Practice

- ***Identify any vague expressions in these sentences and try to make them more precise and explicit.***

  1) The regulations cover the use of oil, gas, etc.

  2) Buildings in the city are constructed of concrete, timber and so on.

  3) For applications, this polymer is very versatile.

  4) There are a number of factors of blood pressure.

ACADEMIC SCIENTIFIC STYLE

5) There are many problems of obesity.

3. 2. Language and conventions

There are many forms of writing that can be labelled as 'scientific', including on the one hand, academic textbooks and journals, and on the other, popular science books, newspaper articles and websites. This section will help you to become more familiar with the language and conventions associated with academic style, and to distinguish this type of writing from the journalistic or informal style found elsewhere. You will then complete a number of tasks to help you improve your own style.

3.2.1 What is academic scientific writing?

Academic scientific writing is characterised by a particular style of writing which you should try to adopt in your assignments.

Explorative Task

- ***Read through the texts below quite quickly, without using a dictionary – it is not necessary to understand every word for this task – and decide whether you think they come from an academic or non-academic source.***

Text A

The basic particles of which atoms are composed are the proton, the electron and the neutron. Some key properties of the proton, electron, and neutron are given in Table 1.4. A neutron and a proton have approximately the same mass and, relative to these, the electron has a negligible mass. The charge on a proton is of equal magnitude, but opposite sign, to that on an electron and so the combination of equal numbers of protons and electrons results in an assembly that is neutral overall. A neutron, as its name suggests, is neutral – it has no charge.

Text B

It sounds like an unusual way to win a Nobel Prize.

But ordinary sticky tape was crucial to the breakthrough that yielded graphene, a material with amazing properties and – potentially – numerous practical applications.

Graphene is a flat layer of carbon atoms tightly packed into a two-dimensional honeycomb arrangement.

ACADEMIC SCIENTIFIC STYLE

It is both the thinnest and the strongest material known to science, and it conducts electricity better than copper.

This year's winners of the physics prize, Andre Geim and Konstantin Novoselov, from Manchester University, UK, extracted graphene from the common material known as graphite – widely used as lead in pencils.

Placing the adhesive tape on graphite, they managed to rip off thin flakes of carbon.

In the beginning they got flakes consisting of many layers of graphene.

But as they repeated the process many times, the flakes got thinner

Text C

Microorganisms are used to recycle water during sewage treatment (Figure 1.7), converting the waste into useful byproducts such as CO2, nitrates, phosphates, sulphates, ammonia, hydrogen sulphide and methane. Microbes have been routinely used for bioremediation since 1988, cleaning up toxic waste generated in a variety of industrial processes. In these cases, the organisms use the toxic waste as a source of energy, and in the process they decontaminate it. They can also clean up underground wells, chemical spills and oil spills as well as producing useful products such as enzymes that are widely used in cleaning solutions.

Text D

One of Faraday's greatest intellectual innovations was the idea of force fields. These days, thanks to books and movies about bug-eyed aliens and their starships, most people are familiar with the term, so maybe he should get a royalty. But in the centuries between Newton and Faraday one of the great mysteries of physics was that its laws seemed to indicate that forces act across the empty space that separates interacting objects. Faraday didn't like that. He believed that to move an object, something has to come in contact with it. And so he imagined the space between electric charges and magnets as being filled with invisible tubes that physically do the pushing and pulling. Faraday called those tubes a force field.

Text E

Buildings in the city of Adapazari, Turkey, suffered heavy damage during the

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1999 Marmara earthquake. Much of the devastation was attributed to the failure of the low plasticity non-plastic silts (Donahue*et al*. 2007) that had been deposited by the Sakarya River in its almost annual flooding of the plain over the past 7,000 years (Bol*et al*. 2010). The flood waters often did not recede for a considerable time, and they occasionally formed lakes.

Text F

In December, philosopher and artificial intelligence expert Aaron Sloman announced his intention to create nothing less than a robot mathematician. He reckons he has identified a key component of how humans develop mathematical talent. If he's right, it should be possible to program a machine to be as good as us at mathematics, and possibly better.

Sloman's creature is not meant to be a mathematical genius capable of advancing the frontiers of mathematical knowledge: his primary aim, outlined in the journal *Artificial Intelligence* (vol 172, p2015), is to improve our understanding of where our mathematical ability comes from. Nevertheless, it is possible that such a robot could take us beyond what mathematicians have achieved so far. Forget robot vacuum cleaners and android waitresses; we're talking about a machine that could spawn a race of cyber-nerds capable of creating entirely new forms of mathematics.

Text G

Recently, Flaherty *et al*.9 published the results of a questionnaire on older outpatients' use of alternative therapies in the US and Japan. According to their data, 74.3% of older Japanese outpatients had used at least one alternative therapy in the past 12 months: 22.0% had used herbs, 7.3% had used acupuncture, and 5.3% had used chiropractic.

Text H

Overweight and obesity are major threats to public health globally. One estimate suggests that 1.46 billion adults worldwide were overweight in 2008, and projections suggest that by 2020 over 70% of adults in the United Kingdom and United States will be overweight. This is likely to result in millions of additional cases of diabetes and heart disease and thousands of additional cases of cancer.

- ***What differences do you notice between the academic and non-academic texts?***

ACADEMIC SCIENTIFIC STYLE

Some of these differences will be explored in the following section.

3.2.2 Common features of academic scientific texts

The academic texts in **3.2.1** are characterised by certain language and conventions.

Explorative Task

- ***Match the features of academic scientific writing style (A) to examples of language and conventions in the examples (B) taken from the texts in 3.2.1.***

A Language and conventions

1) Academic scientific texts use **careful**, **cautious** language when necessary, in order to avoid making overgeneralisations.

Find examples of cautious language:

2) They tend to adopt an **impersonal** style, (--> Appendix 1) making use of passive constructions, and mostly avoiding the use of the personal pronouns *I*, *we* and *you*.

Find examples of passive constructions:

3) They use **scientific/technical terminology** and a **neutral/formal** tone, avoiding the colloquial or highly stylised language sometimes found in popular science books, journalism and websites.

Find five examples of scientific/technical terms:

4) They use **careful punctuation**, making effective use of colons and semi-colons to organise ideas (-->5.2 and 5.3), and mostly avoiding informal punctuation devices such as contractions, dashes and exclamation marks.

Find an example of colon use:

5) They contain **references** to sources, following standard referencing conventions (--> 9.1). They tend not to include detailed bibliographic information in the main text, as is often the case in popular science writing.

Find examples of two styles of academic referencing:

6) They follow established **conventions** with regard to the use of tables and figures.(--> **Chapter 9** for more information on academic and scientific conventions)

Find examples of references to tables and figures:

ACADEMIC SCIENTIFIC STYLE

B Example Texts

a) A neutron and a proton have **approximately** the same mass …

b) This is **likely** to result in millions of additional cases of diabetes and heart disease and thousands of additional cases of cancer.

c) Some key properties of the proton, electron, and neutron **are given** in **Table 1.4**.

d) According to their data, 74.3% of older Japanese outpatients had used at least one alternative therapy in the past 12 months: 22.0% had used herbs, 7.3% had used acupuncture, and 5.3% had used chiropractic.

e) … deposited by the Sakarya River in its almost annual flooding of the plain over the past 7,000 years **(Bol*et al.* 2010)**.

f) **Much of** the devastation **has been attributed** to the failure of the low plasticity nonplastic silts …

g) Microorganisms **are used** to recycle water during sewage treatment **(Figure 1.7)**…

Note that the line between academic and non-academic texts is not always clearly drawn. As you can see from the texts in 3.2.1, academic texts contain occasional informal features such as dashes, e.g.

A neutron, as its name suggests, is neutral – it has no charge.

and the non-academic texts can be academic in tone, e.g.

Graphene is a flat layer of carbon atoms tightly packed into a two-dimensional honeycomb arrangement.

Furthermore, in modern textbooks (including this one!), and some academic journals, informal devices such as contractions and personal pronouns are often employed to make the text more accessible.

While it is good to be aware of the variation in style across academic scientific texts, you should follow the formal conventions outlined above as far as possible in your own academic work, unless otherwise specified, and you should certainly avoid colloquial expressions.

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Study Box: Increasing formality

1) Use the formal negatives *no/little/few*, e.g.

At the time, not many women worked in this area of science.

--> At the time, **few** women worked in this area of science

Not much research has been carried out on this topic.

--> **Little** research has been carried out on this topic.

Note that *few* is used with countable nouns and *little* with uncountable nouns.

Be careful not to confuse with *a few/a little*, meaning *some* or *a small number/amount*.on *fewer* and *less*. (--> Appendix 3, 2.2 on *fewer and less*)

2) Place adverbs before the main verb, rather than at the beginning (or sometimes the end) of a sentence, as is common in spoken English, e.g.

Originally, the research was conducted in China.

--> The research was **originally** conducted in China.

Then the tube was placed in the furnace.

--> The tube was **then** placed in the furnace.

3) Note that, in academic texts, it is generally considered better to avoid the use of *and* and *but* at the start of a sentence.

4) Avoid informal expressions such as *get*, *about, though* and *like*, e.g.

Brown got a Nobel Prize for his work on boranes.

--> Brown **received/earned/was awarded** a Nobel Prize for his work on boranes.

about 200 people

--> **approximately/an estimated** 200 people

Though cooking may destroy the bacterial cells, it is unlikely to inactivate the toxin.

--> **Although** cooking may destroy the bacterial cells, it is unlikely to inactivate the toxin.

devices like smart phones and tablets

--> devices **such as** smart phones and tablets

to be continued

ACADEMIC SCIENTIFIC STYLE

5) Avoid informal uses of *do/make/get* by choosing more formal equivalents:

get worse -->*deteriorate*

make easier -->*facilitate*

do better-->*improve*

6) Be careful when using besides and as well. Used alone, they have an informal tone; in academic writing, they should be followed by a noun or *–ing* form, e.g.

The dye is used in the textile industry. Besides, it has applications in food production.

--> Besides being used in the textile industry, the dye has applications in food production.

The dye has applications in the food industry as well.

--> **As well as being used** in the textile industry, the dye has applications in the food industry.

7) Avoid conversational expressions such as *actually*, *by the way* or *to be honest*.

8) Avoid the informal expressions *more and more* and *a lot of/lots of*, e.g.

A lot of studies back up these findings.

--> **Many/A large number of/A considerable number of** studies back up these findings.

The above expressions should only be used with countable nouns; use the expressions below with uncountable nouns:

a large amount of/a considerable amount of/a great deal of time/money/research

ACADEMIC SCIENTIFIC STYLE

Practice (i)

- ***Identify examples of informal style in these examples from 3.2.1.***

  1) … we're talking about a machine that could spawn a race of cyber-nerds

  2) It sounds like an unusual way to win a Nobel Prize.

  3) … they got flakes consisting of many layers of graphene …

  4) … bug-eyed aliens and their starships …

  5) He reckons he has identified a key component of how humans develop mathematical talent.

  6) And so he imagined the space between electric charges and magnets as being filled with invisible tubes that physically do the pushing and pulling.

  7) … a material with amazing properties and – potentially – numerous practical applications …

  8) Faraday didn't like that.

  9) … Andre Geim and Konstantin Novoselov, from Manchester University, UK …

  10) … his primary aim, outlined in the journal *Artificial Intelligence* (vol 172, p 2015) …

Practice (ii)

- ***Which of these sentences, a or b, would be better in an academic text? Why? Note that all the sentences are grammatically correct, and could possibly feature in academic texts, but one is more academic in style than the other.***

  1)

  a) The first clinical trial was conducted in 2008.

  b) We conducted the first clinical trial in 2008.

  2)

  a) There are three main treatments for cancer – surgery, radiation therapy and chemotherapy.

  b) There are three main treatments for cancer: surgery, radiation therapy and chemotherapy.

  3)

ACADEMIC SCIENTIFIC STYLE

a) Mobile phone use poses a danger to health.

b) Mobile phone use may pose a danger to health.

4)

a) Not many materials exhibit strong magnetism.

b) Few materials exhibit strong magnetism.

5)

a) Rutherford received the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1908.

b) Rutherford got the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1908.

6)

a) There are about 3000 species of cricket in the world.

b) There are approximately 3000 species of cricket in the world.

7)

a) An increasing number of seals are being treated for internal problems caused by oil poisoning.

b) More and more seals are being treated for internal problems caused by oil poisoning.

8)

a) The machine was originally developed for internal company research.

b) Originally, the machine was developed for internal company research.

Practice (iii)

- ***Rewrite these sentences to make them more academic in style. Most sentences only require minor changes.***

1) In the beginning they got flakes consisting of many layers of graphene. But as they repeated the process many times, the flakes got thinner.

2) He reckons he has identified a key component of how humans develop mathematical talent.

3) This study aims to figure what caused the structural damage.

ACADEMIC SCIENTIFIC STYLE

4) A lot of research has been done on the subject of runway friction.

5) Most thermometers are closed glass tubes containing liquids like alcohol or mercury.

6) Then, the solution was heated to about 70°C.

7) You can see the results of the analysis in Table 2.

8) Not much is known about the proteins linked with RNA.

9) Eating disorders cause individuals to feel tired and depressed.

10) There are three different types of volcano – active volcanoes (erupt frequently), dormant volcanoes (temporarily inactive but not fully extinct), and extinct volcanoes (unlikely to erupt again).

Review Task

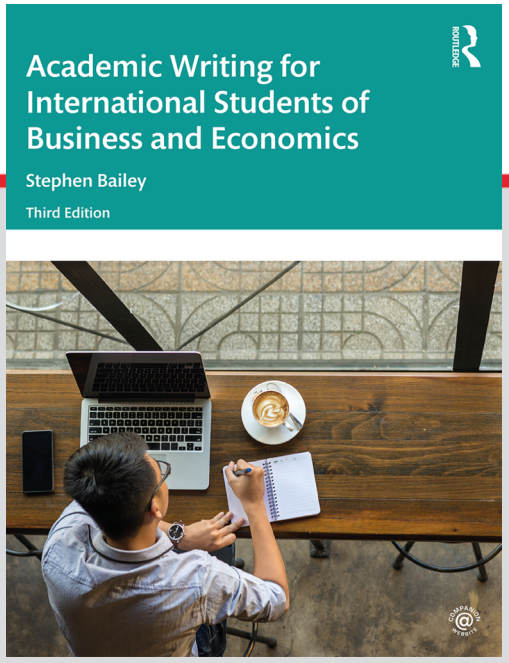
- ***Summarise the information in Text B in 3.2.1, presenting it in a more academic style. You will need to think about organisation of information as well as language. Use your own words as much as possible, but do not try to change technical expressions. --> Chapter 7 for more information on this***

--> Model Text 4, Appendix 4

CHAPTER

5

CASE STUDIES



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CASE STUDIES

Excerpted from *Academic Writing for International Students of Business and Economics*

Both essays and reports may include case studies, which are detailed examples illustrating the the topic under discussion. One case study may be the main subject of an essay, or several may be included to illustrate different situations.

1. Using case studies

A case study attempts to show exactly what happened in a particular situation. For example, if you are studying microfinance, you might look at the performance of one particular scheme in a district of Dhaka, in Bangladesh.

What are the advantages of including case studies?

Are there any disadvantages?

- ***Match the topics on the left with the example case studies on the right.***

Topics	Case studies
Improving crop yields in semi-deserts	A study of a French supermarket training programme
Encouraging entrepreneurship in Africa	The Berlin experiment: increasing public participation in collecting and sorting waste
Approaches to motivation in the service sector	Using solar power to operate irrigation pumps in Ethiopia
The impact of the housing market on the wider economy	A Moroccan scheme for supporting new business start-ups
Improving recycling rates in large cities	The effect of the Spanish property price crash of 2008

CASE STUDIES

2. Model case study

- ***Read the following example of a case study, taken from a longer essay, and answer the questions below.***

Topic: Adapting international brands to local markets

Case Study: The experience of IKEA in China

Introduction

The Chinese economy has expanded at an annual average rate of about 7% for the past 20 years. Parallel to this, the Chinese furniture industry has grown vigorously, with annual sales recently rising by over 20% a year. Legislation to privatise home ownership and rapidly rising income levels have created unprecedented growth in the home improvement sector, and China is now the world's second largest furniture market. This demand has boosted domestic production and also prompted international furniture manufacturers to enter this lucrative market.

IKEA, a Swedish furniture company, was one of the international companies which moved into China. It is a major furniture retailer operating in over 52 countries around the world and had annual sales of over €38 billion in 2018 (IKEA website). It entered the Chinese market in 1998 with its first store in Beijing, and sees great potential in the country, having already expanded to 30 stores and five distribution centres. Despite this successful growth, IKEA has found itself facing a number of challenges in terms of local differences in culture and business practices.

Marketing IKEA in China

Marketing management needs to be largely tailored to local contexts. IKEA has kept this notion in mind when designing marketing strategies and trying to appeal to local customers while maintaining profitability. The company attempts to find the best possible compromise between standardisation and adaptation to local markets. Its product policy pays careful attention to Chinese style and integrates the set of product attributes effectively (Armstrong and Kotler, 2006).

CASE STUDIES

The store layouts reflect the floor plan of many Chinese apartments, and since many of these have balconies, the stores include a balcony section. In contrast with traditional Chinese furniture, which is dark with much carving, IKEA introduces a lighter and simpler style. However, efforts have been made to adapt its products to Chinese taste. For instance, it has released a series of products just before each Chinese New Year. In 2008, the year of the rat, the series 'Fabler' was designed, using the colour red which is associated with good luck.

Changes were also made to some product ranges. In Sweden, people are used to sleeping in single beds, or to putting two single beds together to form a double bed. However, this idea was not very well received by Chinese couples, due to the fact that sleeping in separate beds symbolises a poor relationship and is believed to bring bad luck. In addition, Chinese brand names should have positive connotations. The Chinese name of IKEA (Yi Jia) means 'comfortable home', which gives the company a useful advantage in the market. An important feature of a retailer is the services it offers. The Shanghai store, for instance, has a children's playground and a large restaurant, which make it distinctive. However, Chinese consumers expect free delivery and installation, and although IKEA has reduced its charges for these, it still compares unfavourably with its competitors.

Price

When the company first entered China its target market was couples with an income of 5,000–8,000 Rmb per month. Following steady price reductions this has now been lowered to families with just over 3,000 Rmb. Various strategies have been adopted to achieve these reductions; the most effective being to source locally. 70% of its products sold in China are now made in the country (Song, 2005). Furthermore, IKEA replaced its thick annual catalogue with thinner brochures which now appear five times a year. These not only cut printing costs but also give greater flexibility to adjust prices.

Accessibility is also an important issue for the Chinese market. In most countries IKEA stores are sited near main roads, but as only a minority of likely customers own cars in China, easy access to public transport is vital (Miller, 2004).

CASE STUDIES

Advertising plays an important role in the total promotional mix. IKEA uses advertising effectively, with adverts in the local newspapers to keep customers informed of special offers. All TV commercials are produced locally with Chinese characters. Public relations is also vital to building a good corporate image. In China, IKEA co-operates with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) on forest projects. The company insists on using environmentally friendly and recyclable materials for the packaging of its products, as part of its efforts to build a good corporate image.

Discussion and conclusion

IKEA's product policy in China has been to successfully standardise products as much as possible, but also customise as much as needed. But quality and price are not the only factors in its success. It has learned that service is also vital: free delivery and installation are the perceived rules in the local market which it needs to follow. It has further found that it is better to locate in a downtown area, easily accessible with public transport, when free delivery is not provided. Currently there is a programme to open smaller stores, which offer a limited range of products, in the centres of large cities, as an alternative to the large stores on the outskirts of the cities.

International companies which operate in China, such as IKEA, face more complicated marketing decisions than local companies. They must become culture-conscious and thoroughly research local requirements rather than simply introduce a standard model of business. However, if these considerations are effectively managed the Chinese market offers great potential for innovative retailers. (890 words)

a) Give examples of problems the company has faced in this market.

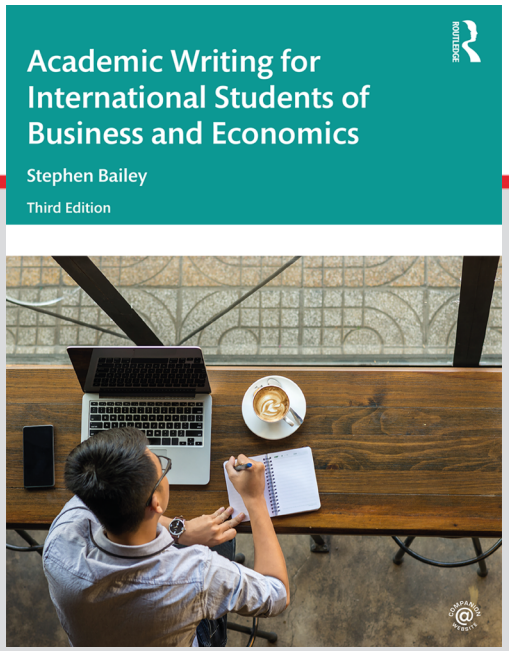
b) What has IKEA done to adapt to the Chinese market?

c) What could be done to improve the case study?

CHAPTER

6

WRITING LONGER PAPERS



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Long essays of 3,000–5,000 words may be required as part of a module assessment. These require more time, research and organisation than short essays, and this unit provides a guide to how such an assignment can be approached.

1. Planning your work

Longer assignments are normally set many weeks before their deadline, which means that students should have plenty of time to organise their writing. However, it is worth remembering that at the end of a semester you may have to submit several writing tasks, so it may be a good idea to finish one well before the deadline.

You should also check the submission requirements of your department. These include style of referencing, method of submission (i.e. electronic, hard copy or both) and place and time of submission. Being clear about these will avoid last-minute panic.

--> *See Unit 1.5 From Understanding Titles to Planning*

- The first thing is to prepare a schedule for your work. An eight-week schedule might look like this:

Week	Stages of work	Relevant units in this book
1	Study title and make first outline. Look for and evaluate suitable sources	1.2, 1.5
2	Reading and note-making. Keep record of all sources used	1.2, 1.3, 1.6, 1.8
3	Reading, note-making, paraphrasing and summarising. Modify outline.	1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 1.7
4	Write draft of main body.	1.10
5	Write draft introduction and conclusion.	1.11
6	Rewrite introduction, main body and conclusion, checking for logical development of ideas and relevance to title.	1.12

WRITING LONGER PAPERS

7	Organise list of references, contents, list of figures and appendices if required. Check all in-text citations.	1.8
8	Proofread the whole essay before handing it in. Make sure that the overall presentation is clear and accurate (e.g. is page numbering correct?).	1.12

- How you actually plan your schedule is up to you, but the important thing is to organise your time effectively. At some point you have to stop researching and start writing (Week 4 in the example above). Leaving the writing stage until the last minute will not lead to a good mark, however much research you have done. There is little value in collecting a large quantity of data or ideas if you cannot use it to answer the question effectively. Although you may be tempted to postpone writing, the sooner you start the sooner you will be able to begin refining your ideas. Remember that late submission of coursework is usually penalised.

2. Formatting the paper

Longer papers may include the following features, in this order:

Title page	Apart from the title, this usually shows the student's name and module title and number
Contents page	This should show the reader the basic organisation of the essay, with page numbers.
List of tables or figures	If the essay includes visual features such as graphs, these need to be listed by title and page number.
Introduction	
Main body	The main body may be divided into sections with sub-headings in bold for each. Your department may require a numbering system, so the sections of the main body are normally numbered 1,2, 3 and then subdivided 1.1, .1.2, etc
Conclusion	

WRITING LONGER PAPERS

Acknowledgments	A space to thank any teachers or others who have assisted the writer.
Notes	These are used to give extra details without interfering with the main narrative. Arabic numbers should be used for these.
List of references	This is a complete list of all the sources cited in the text. Writers occasionally also include a bibliography, which is a list of sources read but not cited.
Appendices **(Singular – appendix)**	These sections are for data related to the topic which the reader may want to refer to. Each appendix should have a title and be mentioned in the main body.

You must check with your department for details regarding typeface, line spacing, margins and other items. You may have the choice of using end notes, which are collected in a section before the list of references, or footnotes at the bottom of each page.

Page numbers: use Roman numbers (i, ii, iii) for the preliminary section from the title page to the end of the contents page, and then use Arabic numbers (1, 2, 3) to number the rest of the text.

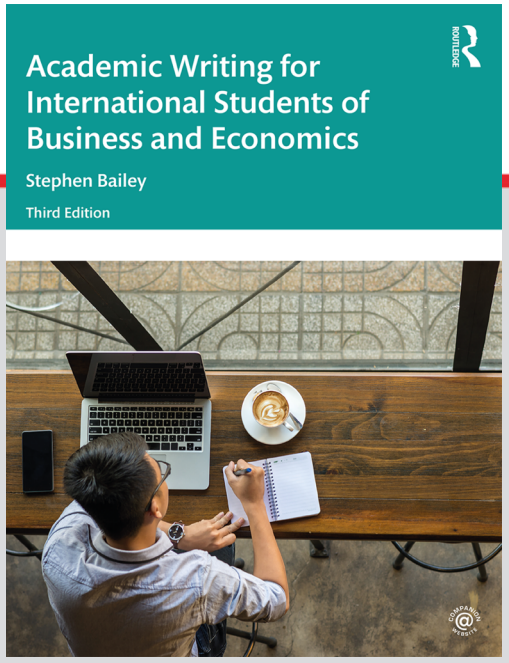
Overall, success with longer papers depends on:

- Having a schedule and keeping to it
- Starting to write the main body early enough
- Being ready to modify your outline if necessary
- Allowing adequate time for editing and proofreading
- Being consistent in formatting e.g. with references

CHAPTER

7

REPORTS AND EXECUTIVES SUMMARIES



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REPORTS AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

Excerpted from *Academic Writing for International Students of Business and Economics*

Students of Business and Economics may often have to write reports as well as essays. Reports and essays are similar in many ways, but this unit explains and illustrates the differences. Executive summaries are commonly used in business to provide senior managers with a short synopsis of lengthy reports.

1. Writing Reports

While essays are often concerned with abstract or theoretical subjects, a report is a description of a situation or something that has happened. In academic terms it might describe:

a) a problem that you have studied and developed several solutions for

b) a survey you have carried out

c) a proposal for a new product or service.

Most reports should include the following features:

Introduction

– background to the subject

– reasons for carrying out the work

– review of other research in the area

Methods

– how you did your research

– description of the tools/materials/equipment used

Results

– what you discovered

– comments on likely accuracy of results

Discussion

– of your main findings

– comments on the effectiveness of your research

Conclusion

– summary of your work

REPORTS AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

– practical implications of the research

– suggestions for further research

2. Essays and reports

In comparison with essays, reports are likely to

a) be based on primary as well as secondary research

b) be more specific and detailed

c) use numbering (1.1, 1.2) and subheadings for different sections.

In most other respects reports are similar to essays since both:

a) have a clear and logical format

b) use an objective and accurate academic style

c) include citations and references

d) make use of visual information in the form of graphs, diagrams and tables

e) include appendices where necessary.

- ***Decide whether the following titles are more likely to be written as reports or essays***

Topic	Report	Essay
1. The development of trade unions in South Africa (1900–2015)		
2. Two alternative plans for improving college open days for prospective students		
3. A survey you conducted to compare male and female attitudes to writing essays		
4. A study of a struggling retail business and proposals to improve its performance		
5. The macroeconomic consequences of negative interest rates		

REPORTS AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

3. Practice

- ***Read the following report and answer the questions which follow.***

A report on student accommodation at Bullbridge College

Introduction

The quality of accommodation is a crucial concern for most students, since having comfortable and affordable housing can be seen as essential for focussing on academic work. Rising student numbers are putting pressure on existing student residences on the campus, so that the College is currently considering building three new blocks in the College grounds which would accommodate approximately 350 students. However, as the estimated cost of these is about £2.75 million ($3.4 million) there is a counter-proposal to spend the money on better teaching facilities and instead rely on private landlords to provide accommodation off-campus. This report sets out to establish what kind of accommodation students prefer, and secondly to discuss how this can be best provided, given the current financial climate. In order to research this question we conducted a survey of 194 current students living in a range of accommodation. On the basis of these results, we then attempted to evaluate the two main options available to the College.

Accommodation survey

We tried to find out why a cross-section of students had chosen their current rooms and how satisfied they were with their choices by conducting a short survey. About 250 students were sent an online questionnaire and 194 of these were completed. Of these, 55% (106) were from female students and 45% (88) were from males. This broadly reflects the gender balance of the College.

Question 1: What kind of accommodation do you have now?

REPORTS AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

Type	College residence on-campus	Student residence off-campus	Shared house or flat – private landlord	At home with parents
Male	36	14	33	5
Female	57	11	29	9
Total	93	25	62	14

It can be seen that the most common type of accommodation is in the College residences, and that only a small minority live with their parents. The results also demonstrate that substantially more females than males live in College residences and with their families.

Question 2: How satisfied are you with your current accommodation? (Rated 1–5 average results)

Type	College residence on-campus	Student residence off-campus	Shared house or flat – private landlord	At home with parents
Male	3.7	4.6	3.4	2.9
Female	4.2	4.1	3.6	4.0
Average	3.95	4.35	3.5	3.45

These results show that the highest levels of satisfaction are found with the off-campus purpose-built residences, provided by private companies. The on-campus College residences are also quite well-liked, but shared houses and flats seem less satisfactory.

Question 3: What do you like and dislike about your current accommodation?

REPORTS AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

Type	College residence on-campus	Student residence off-campus	Shared house or flat – private landlord	At home with parents
Likes	convenient make friends	well-equipped near town centre	cheap can choose friends to share with	economical comfortable
Dislikes	expensive noisy	small rooms expensive	arguments with flatmates poor quality fittings	less freedom can't have friends to stay

Analysis

The survey might have been improved by asking a greater number of students, but 194 responses does provide a significant sample. Perhaps a more serious drawback is that it did not distinguish between different years: first year students may well have different priorities (e.g. making friends) to final year students (who may value the independence of a shared house). However, the results obtained do support anecdotal reports of student preferences.

Conclusion

Clearly living with parents is an option only open to a limited number of students with families living locally, so there are basically three types of student accommodation. Some students will prefer to save money by sharing flats and houses with their friends, and in fact there is a good supply of this type of accommodation provided by private landlords.

The off-campus student residences appear to be rather more popular than the College residences, and from the College's point of view they require no investment. Provided that more of these can be built to accommodate rising student numbers it would seem better for the college to spend its limited capital on new teaching facilities.

a) How could the report be improved?

b) Is anything missing from the report?

REPORTS AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

4. Executive summaries

As the name suggests, with business reports and proposals it is common to preface the texts with a short summary of the main points and conclusions. This allows senior managers to keep abreast of the situation, without needing to study unnecessary detail.

The summary should be written after the report is finalised, and in general will be no more than 10% of the original length.

An effective summary will, depending on the situation:

- explain the issue being discussed
- describe the various options
- identify the best course of action
- give reasons to support this.

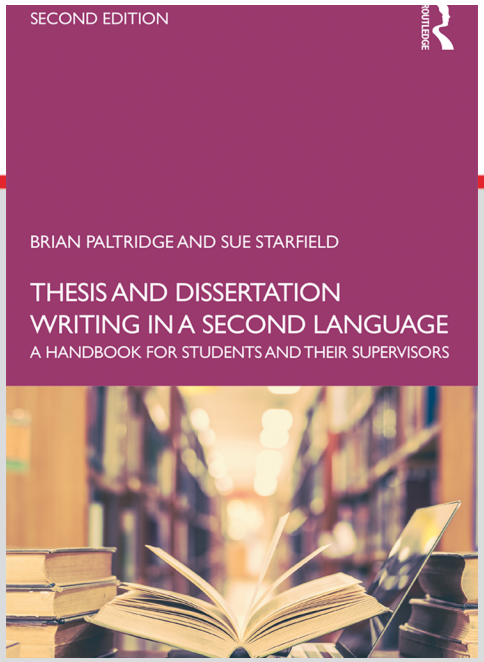
There is no need to include statistical data and other details since the reader always has the option of studying the full report.

■ ***Write an executive summary of the report above in 60–70 words.***

CHAPTER

8

ISSUES IN THESIS AND DISSERTATION IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE



This chapter is excerpted from

Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language: A Handbook for Students and Supervisors

By Brian Paltridge, Sue Starfield

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ISSUES IN THESIS AND DISSERTATION WRITING IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Excerpted from *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language*

Introduction

All students writing a research thesis face the new challenge of having to manage large amounts of text across a lengthy period of time – 80,000 words is the typical length of a doctoral thesis or dissertation in many countries. Prior's (1998) in-depth study of graduate students writing within their disciplines clearly shows that many students, regardless of their backgrounds, struggle with writing at an advanced level; it is both quantitatively and qualitatively a different task to their previous experiences of academic writing. This challenge is heightened for second language speakers as they may struggle simultaneously in several domains, all of which have been identified as influencing academic writing at an advanced level. This chapter discusses four clusters of issues which can directly impact on second language speakers writing a thesis or dissertation in English. While these four factors may impact on all thesis and dissertation writers, it is their intensity and co-occurrence in combination with the need to expand and extend one's linguistic resources in English which may make the challenges for second language writers harder.

Each of the issues will be discussed, in turn:

- emotional issues
- behavioural issues
- rhetorical issues (how language and the conventions of thesis and dissertation writing are used to persuade the reader of the validity of the writer's arguments)
- social issues

Emotional issues

Under this heading a cluster of related issues can be grouped which may directly affect a student's ability to write. We tend to downplay the significance of emotional issues on our research and writing but research is showing that emotional well-being can directly impact on our capacity to begin and to keep writing over the time of the thesis. For example, a large-scale study of the extent to which graduate students at a US university felt anxious about their writing ability found that students who spoke English as a second language had higher writing anxiety than their native English speaker counterparts and felt less confident about their ability (Huerta et al., 2017). Writing anxiety has been shown to correlate with fear of failure and a tendency toward procrastination

ISSUES IN THESIS AND DISSERTATION WRITING IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

(Russell-Pinson & Harris, 2019).

A key factor affecting both graduate students and professors has been identified as the 'impostor' phenomenon or 'impostor syndrome' (Clance & Imes,1978). This is the belief that you are not really competent enough or qualified to be in the position or role you are in and that others will find this out and you will be exposed as a 'fraud' who doesn't deserve to be there.

The 'impostor' phenomenon

How could feelings of being an 'impostor' be affecting you? It may be that you are avoiding showing drafts of your chapters to your supervisor as you are worried that he or she will say they are not good enough. It may be that this anxiety is making it hard for you to write. You may be anxious about asking questions in seminars in case others think you've asked a silly question or made a language error. These feelings could be leading to procrastination, that is, putting off writing.

It is important for students to understand that feelings of a lack of confidence, fear of failure, and rejection are not uncommon. Sometimes, in fact, these issues manifest themselves as perfectionism which can also affect one's ability to write. The unifying thread in these emotional issues that may lead to difficulty with writing or 'writer's block' is the fear the writer has that they are not competent to write a thesis or dissertation; they are an impostor who will be 'found out' and unmasked. International students who are unfamiliar with the academic culture of the new institution may have heightened feelings that they will be found not to be 'qualified' to embark on their research project or that their English will not be judged good enough.

The impostor syndrome is said to be very common in graduate schools and academia more generally; many apparently successful people struggle with feelings of being an impostor. Paltridge and Woodrow (2012) found that the more mature PhD students in their study who were from professional backgrounds tended to feel more insecure in their 'new identity as a researcher and as an academic' (p. 95). Jane, a student in their study, explained how she felt:

> My heart was pounding and I felt as though my head going to burst. I looked at everyone and thought to myself that I was in the company of experienced researchers; was my work good enough, would I 'cut it' as a researcher? I realise now, although I didn't know it at the time that I was suffering an acute attack of the dreaded Imposter Syndrome. (Paltridge & Woodrow, 2012, p. 96)

ISSUES IN THESIS AND DISSERTATION WRITING IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Pauline Clance, a psychologist, has written extensively about the impostor phenomenon and her website has more information on this (https://paulineroseclance.com/impostor_phenomenon.html). In Activity 3.1, we suggest some tips for dealing with these feelings

ACTIVITY 3.1 AM I AN 'IMPOSTOR'?

Take the test

If you sometimes feel that you don't really 'deserve' to be enrolled in a research degree, you can take the impostor phenomenon test online at http://impostortest.nickol.as/ to self assess the extent to which impostor-type feelings may be affecting your thesis writing and sense of yourself as a developing researcher.

What can I do next?

You may be surprised to discover that some of the feelings you are experiencing are actually part of the impostor phenomenon. Often simply knowing that these feelings are shared by many people and being able to acknowledge this to oneself or to others can help students feel more confident.

Think about how you might modify the ways you think and talk about yourself to be more confident and positive.

Try talking to fellow students to see if they sometimes have similar feelings. Sharing experiences of these feelings can be helpful.

You can talk online too! Read this blog post by a PhD student discussing her fears as well as the many helpful and supportive comments from fellow students https://patthomson.net/2015/11/05/why-do-i-feelafraid-to-share-my-journal-paper-with-the-wider-world-is-this-impostersyndrome/.

Joining a writing group is a good strategy for meeting people to talk to and improve your writing. (There is more about this strategy in the Social Issues section below.)

ISSUES IN THESIS AND DISSERTATION WRITING IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Read the section below on the importance of supervisor feedback for developing your writing.

If you are finding that your anxiety is really preventing you from moving ahead with your writing, consider visiting your university's Counselling Centre to seek help.

The other side of the anxiety coin is the desire to write the 'perfect' thesis, which can be just as paralysing, especially when submission draws nearer. Students who tend to perfectionism may struggle with writing in English and experience anxiety about having errors in their writing. They may believe that everyone else writes flawlessly the first time' and thus 'set idealistic and unreachable goals for themselves' (Badenhorst, 2010, p. 72). Of course, a degree of perfectionism is a good thing. Excessive perfectionism can, however, lead to similar outcomes as the impostor phenomenon as students are never quite ready to share their drafts with supervisors or peers as they 'just need a little bit more work' or perhaps a few more papers need to be read first! Both the impostor syndrome and extreme perfectionism can lead to supervisor avoidance which, as we pointed out in Chapter 2, is not a good thing.

Certainly, the emphasis on making an original contribution to knowledge in your PhD (see also Chapter 1) can contribute to feelings of anxiety and inadequacy. Students we talk to are often concerned about failing their PhD; however, research indicates that very few students actually 'fail' a PhD (see for e.g., Mullins & Kiley, 2002), it's more a question of the level of revisions they get asked to do. In fact, fewer than 1% of all theses that are submitted for examination fail (Lovat et al., 2008). Your PhD doesn't need to be worthy of a Nobel prize. In the words of an experienced examiner interviewed by Mullins and Kiley about how they assess research theses:

> A PhD is a stepping stone into a research career. All you need to do is to demonstrate your capacity for independent, critical thinking. That's all you need to do. A PhD is three years of solid work, not a Nobel Prize. (Mullins & Kiley, 2002, p. 386)

The key message here is 'get it done' – do it well but see the PhD as a time-limited

ISSUES IN THESIS AND DISSERTATION WRITING IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

stage in your career development.

The importance of supervisor feedback

Fear of the supervisor's feedback or fear of the supervisor himself or herself can also have an effect on a student's ability to write. Often this fear is related less to something the supervisor may have done or not done and more to the student's own image of the supervisor as a punishing and judging figure. Unfortunately, fear may lead to avoidance behaviour by the student, thus depriving him or her of a valuable source of improvement.

Opportunities for feedback should be sought out rather than avoided. Tailored supervisor feedback has been found to be a key factor in students' academic writing development (Odena & Burgess, 2017) (see Figure 3.4). The Iranian doctoral students interviewed by Riazi (1997) reported that their supervisors' feedback was extremely helpful in their English language development. They saw the supervisor's comments as a significant resource for improving not only their content and ideas but also their language use and the rhetorical organisation of their writing. Ella, a PhD in Biochemistry graduate, interviewed by Odena and Burgess explained, 'I needed to learn the specific skills required for scientific writing. One-on-one discussions [with my supervisor] and feedback on documents which I had written was incredibly useful' (p. 578).

One way of dealing with feelings of being an impostor is to seek out regular feedback on your work. Our advice is to schedule regular meetings with your supervisor (see also our *Tips* list in Activity 2.6 in Chapter 2) and to ask for written as well as oral feedback. If there are comments you don't understand, ask for clarification. If audio-recording your meetings while you become accustomed to your supervisor's accent, intonation, and general speech patterns is helpful, ask them if this would be okay. It may be helpful to adopt Murray's suggestion that students attach to their draft a cover sheet that outlines:

- date, draft number, word count
- the purpose of what you have written
- the kind of feedback you are seeking on this specific piece of writing
- how you have responded to the previous feedback (based on Murray, 2017, p. 231)

Some of our students have found that while they are able to discuss their topic and

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put forward their arguments quite coherently orally, they experience great difficulty with writing. Talking into an audio-recorder or voice recognition software and then editing the transcript has helped several of our students to make progress with their writing. In the section below on social issues, we will talk more about how peer networks and writing groups can help you deal with a possible lack of confidence as well as provide additional sources of feedback on your writing.

ACTIVITY 3.2 WHAT TYPE OF FEEDBACK DO I PREFER?

PhD students interviewed by Odena and Burgess (2017, p. 579) described the kinds of feedback that worked best for them. Read their views shown below, and think about what your preferred type of feedback on your writing is. Perhaps you like a mixture of oral and written feedback. Think about how you could communicate your preferences to your supervisor or to friends who may read your work. If you prefer oral feedback, think about how you will make sure you remember it after the meeting.

> I like written feedback and track changes, you can visit and revisit it many times
>
> (Barak, 3rd year PhD candidate)
>
> I enjoyed it when my principal supervisor sat down and connected, had an interaction. I found that much more useful than pencil written on a paper
>
> (Jenny, EdD graduate)
>
> Sometimes it's helpful to talk about it and actually hearing it rather than writing it … it forces you to think differently about how to say things
>
> (Kate, 4th year PhD candidate)
>
> When we had meetings I would say 'this is what I want to talk about' … I was very self-directed. But I know there are students who are not like that, who need much more structure.
>
> (Tanya, PhD graduate)

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In this section, we have identified some ways in which feelings and emotions can have an impact on your writing behaviour and suggested some possible strategies for understanding and coping with these issues as they arise. It is also important to understand that there are behavioural changes we can make that can help us deal with anxieties we may experience about writing. The next section discusses behaviours that are related to personal organisation and time management, two elements that Odena and Burgess (2017) found crucial for academic writing development (see Figure 3.4).

Behavioural issues

What do we mean when we suggest that behavioural issues can affect your ability to write your thesis? And if this is the case, can you do anything to change your behaviours? Several studies of research students have highlighted the multiple demands on their time. International students in particular may be juggling study, work, and family commitments (both family who are with them and in their home country) (Odena & Burgess, 2017; Paltridge & Woodrow, 2012). In this section we look more closely at issues of time – which crop up regularly in students' most frequently listed issues and difficulties – and how varying your behaviours might assist you in writing more productively.

Making writing a habit

Thesis writers and academics frequently complain about not having enough time to write. They claim that if they only had more time, they would have no problem writing. What we need to do to, however, is to change how we use the time we have. Rowena Murray (2013) argues that we need to think about *making* time rather than *finding* time. Murray, and a number of other scholars who have studied how successful academics write, advocate what she calls brief daily sessions. Brief daily sessions involve writing regularly (ideally, daily), at a specific time and in a specific place and typically for a specific time period. Adopting this approach helps integrate writing into your life, in other words, making it *a behaviour* – something that you do regularly.

Many writers struggle with writing as they erroneously believe writing is a creative and spontaneous act: that they can only write when they are inspired. In fact, as Zerubavel (1999) argues in his highly recommended study of successful writers, writing needs to become a habit.

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Paradoxically, through writing regularly, ideally on a daily basis, our inspiration will come as we build a writing routine. Developing a writing schedule that you stick to can play a key role in getting those 'light bulb' moments. It can also reduce the likelihood of your thesis writing taking over your whole life as you schedule specific writing times rather than feeling that you need to be writing constantly (which is impossible).

If your current approach to writing is working for you, there's no need to change. If, however, you are feeling stuck and that your thesis writing is not progressing as you would like, consider trying out what Murray (2013) calls *snacking*– that is regular writing but for defined, shorter periods of time. What causes problems for many writers, according to Murray, is the idea that they can only write if and when they have large chunks of time available for what she calls a writing *binge*– writing for extended periods of time, often in an attempt to meet a deadline, which can become unproductive and exhausting. While complex intricate thinking cannot be done in 15-minute 'snacks', she suggests that a combination of larger time slots combined with briefer 30-minute slots may be helpful. Scheduling regular writing times each week as recommended by Zerubavel (see Activity 3.3) has been found by many writers, both academics and novelists, to help productivity.

If you are writing in English as an additional language, writing from early on and writing regularly is most important. The hardest part is generating text and it does take longer if you are putting ideas and language together in new ways. The more time you have for doing this and for redrafting and editing, the more your writing will develop (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2).

In our view, one of the greatest obstacles to students' writing is the little phrase 'writing up' – which leads to students putting off writing until such time as the research is perceived to be 'done'. You need to see writing as an integral part of the research process and begin to write from early on, whether it be initially through notes and reflections, through logs and diaries or through early drafts of a literature review. This is vital as the skills of writing are acquired developmentally over time and language continues to develop incrementally.

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ACTIVITY 3.3 BUILDING WRITING INTO MY LIFE

Based on Zerubavel's (1999) recommendations, we've drawn up a list of key questions to ask yourself as you begin to develop a writing schedule:

1. How much time do I want to spend writing each week (i. e., how many hours per week)?

2. How long do I want each writing session to be?

3. What time of day works best for me for writing (e.g., morning, afternoon, evening)?

4. What is the best place for me to write in?

5. What are my A and B times for writing? *A-times* are those times of the day when you feel at your writing 'best'. These should be used for writing and thinking; for generating ideas and text. *B-times* are when you may be a bit tired; it may be a bit noisy or you may be on a bus or a train but there is still work you can do like checking your references, updating your Table of Contents, or proofreading. Both can be used productively (see also Zerubavel, 1999 for more detail).

Then draw up a writing schedule based on your answers to these questions

Use your calendar to map out your writing days and times. Alternatively, download and print (on A3 paper if you can), the year-long calendar available here https://student.unsw.edu.au/sites/all/files/uploads/group40/2019_A4.pdf. Fill in all your major deadlines and activities for the year and keep it updated. Then look at where you can schedule your writing times to help you meet your writing deadlines. At this stage, switch to a weekly planner: you can download a weekly one at this link, https://student.unsw.edu.au/sites/all/files/uploads/group40/A4_Weekly. pdf and you will also find an editable Word version there. Your schedule may differ from week to week. What's important is that you identify dedicated weekly writing time in your calendar and don't let other activities eat into this time. Zerubavel (1999) advises writing frequently and regularly so as not to lose your momentum. It will become easier over time to do this and stick to it as you experience the benefits.

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Excerpted from *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language*

Writing as a process

As we mentioned above, one of the impediments to writing can be the idea of delaying writing until a few months before the thesis is due and then sitting down to 'write it up'. As should be clear by now, we strongly believe that you should be writing from the outset and using writing throughout the time of your thesis to work out what you are thinking and understanding. Scheduling regular writing can help prevent last-minute writing to unrealistic deadlines. Writing is a process of constant revision and refinement that helps us clarify our thoughts. If we leave this to near the end, we lose the important time needed for revision and redrafting. Ideally, we like to see at least two full drafts of each chapter our students write and then at least two full drafts of the final thesis before submission or the viva. Figures 3.1 and 3.2 illustrate the amount and extent of revision that experienced and successful writers undertake before getting to the final draft.

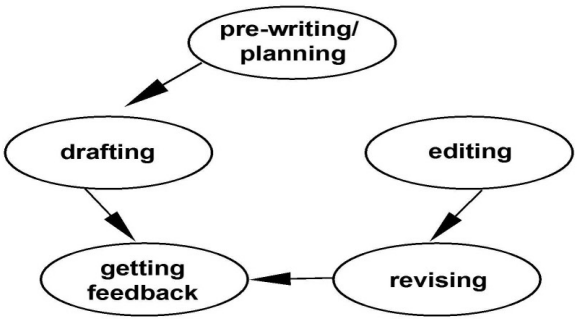

Figure 3.1 A simplified model of the writing process (Atkinson & Curtis, 1998, p. 15).

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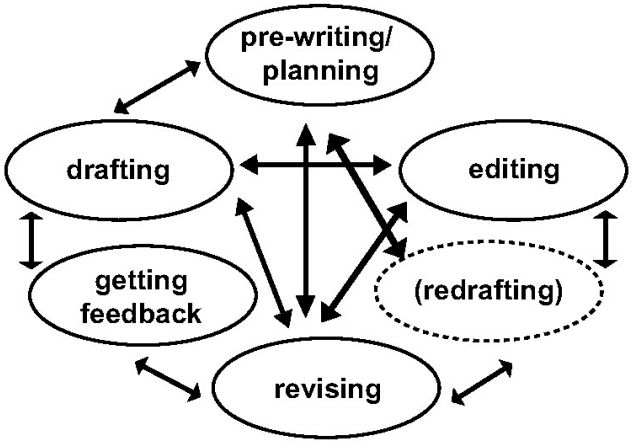

Figure 3.2 A more realistic model of the writing process (Atkinson & Curtis, 1998, p. 16).

Figure 3.1 shows how early studies of the processes writers go through as they write conceptualised writing as a process involving prewriting or planning, drafting, getting feedback, revising, and then editing before 'submitting'. These studies helped shift our understanding of writing from simply being about coming up with an idea or a plan and sitting down to write without taking time to seek feedback and revise in terms of the feedback. However, more recent research has demonstrated the even greater complexity of the processes we engage in when writing (see Figure 3.2), highlighting the non-linear nature of writing and the multiple iterations involved. The usefulness of this research for second language thesis writers is that it helps break a highly complex set of processes into a series of simpler stages or sub-tasks which enable you to 'get started' and have a sense of accomplishment as these smaller tasks are completed. The diagram illustrates the key role of feedback and the importance of revising and shows that there will be times at which you may need to redraft (go back closer to the beginning) rather than simply revise. Extensive drafting and feedback should also effectively reduce potential plagiarism as you will be receiving feedback on a continuous basis.

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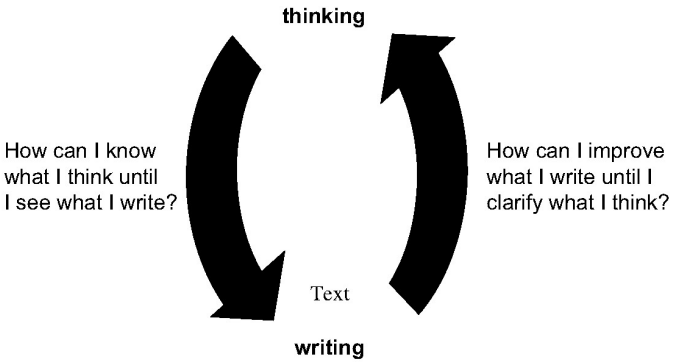

Figure 3.3 The reciprocal relationship of writing and thinking (Huff, 1999, p. 7).

Academic writing at an advanced level is therefore more than 'just getting ideas down on paper' and being sure that they are in 'good English' (Atkinson & Curtis, 1998, p. 17). What research student writers need to grasp is that there is a reciprocal relationship between thinking and writing (see Figure 3.3). Writing is an essential means of clarifying our thoughts which is why delaying writing can become an obstacle to the development of understanding and why, conversely, regular writing facilitates the development of understanding of a topic.

Generating text

Biggs et al. (1999) point out that second language writers may be spending proportionately too much of their time on what they call the mechanics of Writing – on sentence, grammar, and word-level features – rather than on generating meaning at a higher level and then organising it into sentences and finding the appropriate words. The overarching themes of the writing may then be lost and unsupported and sections of text become irrelevant even though well written at a sentence level. They encourage students to generate text and revise and edit it later which may reduce blocking.

Murray (2017) recommends a very useful strategy for encouraging thesis writers to generate text, particularly in the early stages of the PhD. She suggests that the following set of prompts can help students write about the context of their topic. The prompts can be used repeatedly as your focus develops or alters.

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The text that you generate through using the prompts can be expanded by you, revised, and edited. By writing these 325 words, you will have begun to write your thesis!

What can I write about? The context/background to my research

My research question is …. (50 words)

Researchers who have looked at this subject are …. (50 words)

They argue that …. (25 words)

Smith argues that …. (25 words)

Brown argues that …. (25 words)

Debate centres on the issue of …. (25 words)

There is still work to be done on …. (25 words)

My research is closest to that of X in that …. (50 words)

My contribution will be …. (50 words)

(Murray, 2017, pp. 118–119)

Rhetorical issues

Rhetoric is the art of persuasion and has its origins in ancient Greece with philosophers like Aristotle who was skilled at persuading his listeners to accept and believe in his arguments. When we talk about rhetorical issues facing thesis writers today, we are referring to the importance of thinking about who is reading your thesis and how you are going to develop an argument in your thesis to persuade your reader(s) that your research is valid, interesting, and makes a contribution to your disciplinary area. A completed thesis or dissertation is never simply a description of what you read and what you did, it is a sustained argument developed over the entire thesis, supported by evidence, usually from your study, and supported by what you've read, in which you attempt to persuade the reader – your supervisor and the examiners – of the validity of the claims you are making and of the arguments you are putting forward.

For many students, writing a thesis or dissertation will be the first time they have had to consider rhetorical issues of this nature while managing and structuring such a large amount of text. Writing a thesis or a dissertation can be a

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> most formidable task for many graduate students. [...] not only because of the daunting size of the document but also because of the high standard to which the thesis/dissertation is held. The writing challenge is not only demonstrating knowledge related to the research but also using that knowledge to '*argue logically and meaningfully the meaning of the research results*'.
>
> (Dong, 1998, p. 369. Our emphasis)

Biggs et al.(1999) and Torrance and Thomas (1994) found that all writers benefit from explicit instruction on how to structure a thesis and its constituent parts. These findings are supported by extensive research into academic writing that emphasises the importance of explicit teaching of the structure of specific written genres, particularly to writers for whom English is a second language.

Much supervisor knowledge of writing is tacit, however, and, although supervisors recognise 'good writing', they often find difficulty in explaining to their students how to produce it. One of the main aims of this book is to help research students develop a more explicit understanding of how theses and dissertations are structured and organised in English.

Becoming a responsible writer

As Tardy (2005) points out, the advanced academic literacy needed by research students requires not only linguistic ability but 'rhetorical insight' into their 'disciplinary community's ways of building and disseminating information' (p. 326). An integral part of successful thesis writing is understanding the expectations of your *audience*, that is your readers. And their expectations are shaped by the discipline they are part of and its history of what makes a particular text successful.

Dunleavy (2003) underlines the importance for the thesis writer of managing reader expectations and always writing with the reader in mind. Students from a range of linguistic backgrounds may experience difficulty with the degree of explicit guidance to the reader that characterises academic English prose. English (and some other languages of Germanic origin) have been described as 'writer responsible' in that 'English speakers, by and large, charge the writer, or speaker, with the responsibility to make clear and well-organized statements' (Hinds, 1987, p. 143). In contrast, writers of languages which tend to be more 'reader responsible', such as French or Polish, or a number of Asian languages, may perceive the

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direction, signalling, and signposting to the reader required in a lengthy thesis insulting to the intelligence of their reader as they imagine him or her. We find that for our students the notion of writer responsibility can be very helpful in the structuring of their writing (see also Chapter 1). Nuria, a doctoral student from Latin America studying in the UK found it difficult at first to adapt to the more writer responsible expectations of academic English:

> In Latin America it's a little more descriptive, so here you have to be very accurate with every sentence you use, be very short, but in Latin America we use very long sentences, we go around an idea. The first year it was very difficult for me to understand what was the level required.... It took me a lot of reading, a lot of feedback, long sessions of supervision, long sessions of reviewing my own writing to understand what was expected from me.
>
> (Nuria, 3rd year doctoral student,cited in Odena & Burgess, 2017, p. 584)

It's hard to know how long a sentence or for that matter a paragraph should be. In general, it seems that academic English favours a shorter sentence than the more reader responsible languages we discussed earlier in this chapter. Hartley and Cabanac (2016) provide what they call three simple rules for making academic text easier to read:

- Rule 1: if a paragraph is too long split it in two.
- Rule 2: long sentences can be split into two (or more) ....
- Rule 3: examine each sentence, in turn, to see if you can delete two (or more) words from each one.

You should only follow their advice when editing your work, not while drafting as it will slow you down too much. However, their method can be a helpful editing tool. Before trying it out, have a look at the examples of sentences and paragraphs they've edited at this link:

https://doctoralwriting.wordpress.com//?s=long+sentences&search=Go.

A key way in which writers acknowledge their responsibility is through their use of *metadiscourse* which can be described as the writer's overt acknowledgment of the reader (Dahl, 2004). Metadiscourse primarily plays the role of organising the text for the reader and is used by the writer to interact with the reader about the content of the text.

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Excerpted from *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language*

Second language writers need to be become familiar with how metadiscourse operates in academic English, specifically the ways in which the lengthy text of the thesis needs previews, reviews, and overviews to assist the reader make sense of the structure and arguments. The following extract illustrates the way in which the writer of a PhD thesis on environmental policy begins Chapter 2 of his thesis with a brief overview, providing useful signposting for the reader as to the scope of the chapter:

> This chapter reviews empirical evidence of the distributional impact of environmental policies. The scope of the review is on policies that aim to reduce environmental problems related to energy consumption. These include, for example, emission of greenhouse gas and pollution from vehicle fuel use. Carbon taxes or energy taxes are the principal policy that is examined.
>
> (Yusuf, 2007, p. 12)

The concept of metadiscourse is discussed at greater length in subsequent chapters and illustrated in many of the annotated examples in later chapters of this book (see also Chapter 1). Johnston's findings from her study of 51 examiners reports of doctoral theses provide further evidence of the expectations the reader/examiner of the thesis has and the importance of signposting in the thesis. Some of her key findings are summarised below:

- Examiners approach reading a thesis with an air of expectation and even enthusiasm, but this disappears if the thesis is not *reader friendly.*
- General impression and overall presentation of the thesis seems particularly important to the examiners.
- The reader needs to be assisted through the use of summaries, logical sequencing, signposts, and the removal of excessive repetition.
- All readers require assistance to understand the work; they feel distracted and irritated by poorly presented work; they appreciate well-written, interesting, and logically presented arguments (Johnston, 1997, p. 340).

Relatedly, the second language students studied by Shaw (1991) struggled with the notion of audience – for whom were they writing their thesis? What was the image of the reader they had in mind as they wrote? Whereas undergraduate students clearly know they are writing to be assessed and therefore need to display their

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knowledge of the topic, regardless of the fact that the marker will know all about the topic, the thesis writer has a more complex relationship to his or her audience, in effect caught between 'knowledge-display and information transmission' (Shaw, 1991, p. 193). In fact, the real and most immediate readers (or audience) of the thesis will be the supervisor and the external examiners who will already know much about the topic. Thesis writers then have, to some extent, to display their knowledge of the field, though in a more sophisticated and elaborated way than an undergraduate. They are not simply communicating as one expert to another or communicating with a non-specialist with some background knowledge but are writing to persuade an expert that they are worthy to join a community of scholars (see also Chapter 1).

This potential role confusion can impact on a thesis writer's sense of identity as they straddle the border between being a student and being a peer. If you are simultaneously writing journal articles for publication and your thesis, you will need to adopt a more 'expert' sounding voice in the journal articles, whereas in the thesis you may need to 'sound' more like a student, albeit a 'sophisticated' one. How to sound both authoritative and deferent is a challenge, more especially in a language that is not your first language. It is very important that you think about who your audience and readers are both in terms of writer responsibility and the specific rhetorical (persuasive) aims of your thesis.

Furthermore, thesis writers need to understand that they will be evaluated by their readers (examiners) in their own terms – in terms of the claims they make in their argument. Mullins and Kiley (2002) found that experienced examiners are careful to check for links between the introduction in which students state their intentions and the conclusion 'where the intentions should have been realised' (p. 385). Moderating one's claims becomes very important; you should neither 'boost' your claims too strongly or overgeneralise nor should you fail to make them with the appropriate force to convince the reader of the value of the claim being made. This is where the linguistic resources known as 'hedges' become extremely important to second language thesis writers as they learn how to adjust the strength of their claims in relation to their audience and communicative purpose. Hedging is discussed in more detail in Chapters 9 and 10.

In her study of a second language master's student's development as a successful thesis writer, Tardy (2005) shows how Paul (the student) revised his text as he became more aware of the need to explicitly persuade his reader of the logic of his

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argument. She quotes him as saying:

> one thing I learned from this is when I wrote something quite long, I *must* make it *clear* that what I try to express is interesting to readers. I cannot just put lots of experimental results in my writing without explaining what's the importance of this result and why we should care about this experiment.
>
> *(Tardy, 2005, p. 332. Emphasis in original)*

Fine-tuning' your academic language

Flowerdew (1999) noted that Hong Kong Chinese scholars attempting to publish in English experienced difficulty in a number of areas. These included the length of time it took them to write in English; expressing their ideas in English; the extent and richness of their vocabulary and making claims for their research that had the requisite degree of force. They felt that their language skills limited them to a simple style of writing; they perceived writing qualitative research to be more challenging than quantitative research and found writing the introductions and discussion sections of research articles to be particularly difficult. While Flowerdew interviewed academics who had completed a doctorate and who were writing for publication, the issues he examines are equally pertinent for non-native speakers of English who are writing a doctoral or master's thesis.

In Shaw's (1991, pp. 195–196) study, the students reported that using semi-technical vocabulary and finding the right word for the context were their areas of greatest difficulty. However, he found that many of the students had developed a strategy of extensive reading in their subject area followed by note-making of useful terms that they could use in their own writing. Phrases such as 'the foregoing indicates', 'highlighted the fact that', and 'such tests are still useful but it is now recognised that…' would be noted down and reused. One of the Russian students interviewed by Angelova and Riazantseva (1999) made lists of words and phrases that she could use to introduce topics, build arguments, agree or disagree with a position, and close a discussion. This strategy helped her when she felt unable to write.

When you are reading, you should try to read not only for content but to also pay attention to the ways expert writers of books and articles structure their texts in the way Shaw's students did. This can help you expand your linguistic resources. A number of writing specialists recommend what has been called a 'language re-use'

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strategy (Flowerdew & Li, 2007). Let us be very clear, we are not in any way suggesting that students plagiarise the words of others; what is, however, being suggested is that there are many commonly used words and phrases in academic English that can be reutilised both across and within disciplines, independently of specific content. These are the types of words and phrases that can be found, for example, in the online *Academic Phrasebank* (see below). It should be noted that these are usually fairly short phrases of not more than about five to six words.

Our students find the *Academic Phrasebank* www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/ referred to in Chapter 1 extremely helpful. This site contains a large searchable database of the 'building blocks' of academic language gathered from published research articles and doctoral dissertations. Like this book, the *Phrasebank* is organised around common organisational patterns found in journal articles and theses and dissertations: introducing your work, referring to sources, describing methods, reporting results, discussing findings, and writing the conclusion. Clicking on these headings will take you to lists of generic examples of how to express these patterns in English. All the disciplinary or subject content has been removed so you cannot be said to have plagiarised if you use these language patterns to build and develop your academic writing.

Down the left-hand side of the website is a list of commonly used academic language functions such as explaining causality, being cautious, being critical, and so forth. If, for example, you were keen to expand your linguistic resources for using metadiscourse and signposting your thesis (see above), you could click on the link to *signalling transition* where you will find hundreds of examples of different phrases to help your readers make sense of your text that you can try out.

An Indonesian student, Danu, who was struggling with writing more critically in his literature review, found the *being critical* section of the *Academic Phrasebank* extremely helpful. A comparison of the two short extracts below from his draft review illustrates how he strengthened his critical voice through integrating language from the *Academic Phrasebank*:

> Danu's initial version:
>
> However, a closer look at the study shows that some items which are supposed to measure reading enjoyment such as "**Reading is boring**." and "**Reading is a waste of time**" were categorized into reading anxiety. (...) (Emphasis in original)

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Revised version:

> **One question that needs to be asked**, however, is why some items which are supposed to measure reading enjoyment such as "Reading is boring" and "Reading is a waste of time" were clustered into reading anxiety. **A serious weakness with** the clustering of the items is that…**Another major drawback of this study is**… (Emphasis added).
>
> (Cited in Mochizuki, 2019. Expressions in bold from *Academic Phrasebank*)

A related strategy is the 'sentence skeleton' or template recommended by Swales and Feak (2012), Cargill and O'Connor (2009) and Thomson and Kamler (2016). The idea behind the sentence skeleton is that you 'strip' the flesh (i.e., the content) off the bones of the paragraph that you would like to use as a model for your writing and you are left with a skeleton that you can use to build your own paragraph, using your own disciplinary content. On her blog, *Patter*, Pat Thomson provides some examples of paragraph skeletons she's developed: https://patthomson.net/2011/07/11/writing-skeletons/.

One straightforward way of checking if these phrases and expressions are used in your field and how they are used is to use *Google Scholar* to look or examples of common usage. It can also help you build your academic vocabulary. Swales and Feak (2012) provide instructions on how to use *Google Scholar* to search for examples of commonly used words and how they are typically used in contexts with other words such as prepositions and adjectives. So, if, for example, a search of the commonly used phrase "recent research has…" (you must use double quotation marks) finds over half a million examples and shows that verbs such as *witnessed*, *led to*, *revealed*, *been carried out*, *investigated*, *has mainly focussed on*, *established*, and so on have all been used, you can see which ones work best in your sentences and paragraphs. Chen and Flowerdew (2018) report on a Computer Science PhD student from Hong Kong who found using this *Google Scholar* strategy very helpful when writing for publication.

Using features of your word-processing program such as an online thesaurus can also help build your vocabulary. The online Academic Word list www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist/publications/AWLmostfreqsublists.pdf contains the 570 most frequently used academic word families (the word family for 'analyse' – the most commonly used academic word – consists of 15 variants of 'analyse' with 'analysis' being the most frequently used). By the time you start writing your thesis, you should at least be familiar with all the word families on the list.

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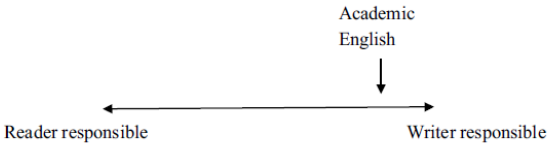
ACTIVITY 3.4 BECOMING A MORE RESPONSIBLE WRITER

Think about where your first language might sit on the reader responsible writer responsible continuum below. What could the implications be for your thesis writing in English?



Based on what you've read in this chapter, on your experience of reading academic texts in English and any feedback you've had on your writing, are there aspects of your writing style you may want to fine-tune?

Have a look at three recent theses in your field. Ask yourself:

- Are they 'reader friendly'? If so, what features make them so?
- What kinds of signposting do the authors use? Look at headings and sub-headings but also at beginnings and ends of chapters.
- Can you get a good idea of the structure and organisation of the thesis from the Table of Contents?
- Check for the links between what the authors say they will do in the Introduction and the extent to which in the Conclusion they show how they have done this. Also check the Research Questions and how each one is addressed in the Discussion and Conclusion sections of the thesis.
- Is it clear to you what the 'knowledge contribution' of each thesis is? Could you write it down in one or two sentences?

If you want to find out more about what thesis readers (examiners) expect, Clinton Golding (2017) has written a helpful article based on the research into what examiners look for in a thesis. His advice is available in open access here: www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/23265507.2017.1300862?needAccess=true

You can also read Sue Starfield's blogpost on this same topic here: https://doctoralwriting.wordpress.com/2015/06/10/from-finish-tostart-writing-your-thesis-with-the-end-in-view/

ISSUES IN THESIS AND DISSERTATION WRITING IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Excerpted from *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language*

Writing with authority and developing your 'voice'

Morena, a PhD student studying in New Zealand, described her feelings at the beginning of her research:

> I don't feel I am in a position to critique anything, I agree with almost everything I read … and even when I can't make sense of what I'm reading my first reaction is always to think that the problem lies in me – the reader – not having the necessary knowledge to comprehend a complex idea.
>
> (Botelho de Magalhães et al., 2019)

This sense of lacking the authority to critically evaluate the work of others is not uncommon. We've already alluded to the complexities surrounding how authoritative to sound in your thesis when we discussed becoming a responsible writer; further compounding the issue, is finding the appropriate 'voice' in English. Many of the international students who enroll in postgraduate study are already successful writers in their first language and have established a strong sense of self as a writer in this language or, in fact, in several languages (Hirvela & Belcher, 2001). However, limited linguistic resources can mean that writing a thesis in English and 'sounding like' the sort of person they would like to sound like can become frustrating. Thesis writers who are established professionals or academics in their home country can experience 'extreme difficulty […] making the transition from holding a position of professional respect in the native country to the anonymous and relatively powerless life of a graduate student in the new country' (Hirvela & Belcher, 2001, p. 99). Finding an appropriate academic 'voice' can also prove difficult for students from politically repressive regimes who may have difficulty expressing critical perspectives or their own opinion which are standard expectations of Western Anglophone universities (Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999). More generally, research has shown that 'finding your voice' is a key factor in academic writing development at an advanced level (see also Figure 3.4).

Shen (1989), who moved from China to study in North America, insightfully captures the extent of the conflict a student may experience as he or she struggles to find an academic English 'voice' and the implications for their sense of self. He eventually arrived at an innovative resolution of his sense of having to become a different person when writing in English:

> First I made a list of (simplified) features about writing associated with my old identity (the Chinese Self), […] and then beside the first list I added a column of features about writing associated with my new identity (the English Self). After that

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> I pictured myself getting out of my old identity, the timid, humble, modest Chinese "I" and creeping into my new identity (often in the form of a new skin or a mask), the confident, assertive, and aggressive English "I'.
>
> (Shen, 1989, p. 462)

Similarly, Diego whose first language is Spanish, describes his journey to develop a stronger 'critical' voice: 'My supervisor kept pointing out that I needed to be critical because I was being very expository, that took me some time to understand because I felt that I was no one to be critical of others' works' (cited in Botelho de Magalhães et al., 2019, p. 10. In Diego's account of his progress towards being more critical he moved from 'producing a descriptive summary of other researchers' ideas to 'mimicking' the ways 'well-established authors adopt a critical perspective'. His supervisor suggested he stop using verbatim quotes which simply reproduced the voices of other writers and paraphrase instead. He found that in these early stages he was using 'stated' as his main reporting verb which led to summaries of other writers' views without evaluation. It took him almost three years and a lot of reading to develop a more critical approach to the literature:

> When I began to read the literature, I tended to agree with everything because everything made sense at first sight. Since I had not adopted a position, most ideas seemed fine to me … it was only when I found a theoretical framework that I could identify with, that I was able to critical views of others' works.
>
> (Diego, cited in Botelho de Magalhães et al., 2019, p. 10)

To develop a more critical voice, Diego adopted the strategy of using 'concessive' clauses introduced by phrases such as 'although' or 'even though' and conjunctions such as 'yet' and 'however' which he felt allowed him to 'respectfully acknowledge' the cited writer's ideas before he expressed his own view.

Varying your citation patterns can help make your writing sound more authoritative. If you begin each sentence or paragraph of your literature review with the name of one of the authors you are reviewing, you are giving up some of your 'voice' to theirs. Rudestam and Newton (2007) suggest several quite simple but not immediately obvious ways in which the literature review can begin to sound more like your 'take' on the topic so that your own 'voice' begins to emerge:

- Try to avoid beginning your sentences with 'Jones said …' 'Smith found …' – this shifts the focus of your reviews from your own argument to the work of others.

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• Try to 'develop a theme and then cite work of relevant authors' (p. 65) to support your arguments or to provide examples or counter-examples of your point.

• Try to limit excessive quoting. This can also lessen your authority and control.

• Try to avoid reporting everything. Be selective – 'build an argument not a library' (p. 66).

Using the first person

We are often asked by our students about whether they can use the first person singular pronoun 'I' in their thesis writing. These are students in education, the social sciences, and the humanities. It seems to still be the case that the sciences, medicine, and engineering generally avoid the first person. How do you make a decision about when and whether to use 'I' in writing your thesis? There is certainly no consensus on this and the decision you will make will typically be shaped by the research paradigm you have adopted, conventions in your discipline, and the type of research you are doing. However, things are changing and you should definitely discuss options with your supervisor and take note, when reading journal articles and recent theses in your field, of whether they are using 'I' and how they are using it (see also Chapter 1).

In a study of thesis introductions in History and Sociology PhDs, Starfield and Ravelli (2006) argued that 'I' was used to convey different meanings at different places in the introduction, depending on the writer's purpose. They identified five different uses of 'I' in the 20 introductions they examined:

•*I* as guide or architect – to structure the discourse and state a purpose

• methodological *I*– explains what the researcher did/considered doing int he research process

•*I* as opinion holder – I think/believe/assume

•*I* as originator – author as 'claim maker'

• Reflexive *I*

'I' as guide or architect was seen as the least authoritative use, with 'I' being used to guide the reader through the text in phrases such as 'I want to explore' and 'I want to investigate'. *Methodological I* is similar in that the first person serves to order the account of the research process: for example, 'A small number of interviewees insisted on confidentiality, and I have taken such ethical considerations into account in how I have utilised the interview material throughout the thesis' (p. 232).

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I as opinion holder and *I as originator* sound more authoritative as the writers express opinions and make claims:

• 'But it is also related, I think, to deeper, long-held assumptions about the relationship between work and modernisation that have informed the sociological imagination' ('I' as opinion holder) (p. 232).

• 'I argue that Foucault's rigorous critique of the repressive hypothesis can be read as a comprehensive account of power's complex ontology' ('I' as originator (p. 233) (Starfield & Ravelli, 2006).

What Starfield and Ravelli (2006) called *Reflexive I* was found in some of the theses where the writers explicitly positioned themselves as a researcher in their study and reflected on their role, giving themselves a strong personal 'voice'. This is probably the most 'tricky' use of 'I' but is becoming an accepted part of qualitative research writing and is used in the example below:

> The writing of this thesis was a process that I could not explore with the positivistic detachment of the classical sociologist. After all I was affected by the repression, the exile and the mutations within Chilean society as much as anyone else in the country. (p. 234)

While the examples shown here are from history and sociology theses, the first person is being used in some science theses too. For example, in her study of bats living in urban areas, Caragh Threlfall (2011) made extensive use of the first person in her introduction, using mainly *I as guide* and *methodological I* :

> The aim of this thesis is to help fill this knowledge gap. I firstly establish a trait-based response of the bat community, where biogeographical factors including landscape productivity, the level of urbanisation and habitat loss are used to explore the overall bat response and community structure. I then explore these mechanisms using mensurative and manipulative studies at a landscape and local scale …. In this way, I have used a combination of approaches which are typically used in isolation ….

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ACTIVITY 3.5 CAN I USE THE FIRST PERSON?

Read the two quotes below from students Lina and Diego and think about what your preference is for how you will talk about yourself in your thesis (once you've read the section on writer voice, of course!).

I always used "one" instead of you or I, before the course, I thought that was expected of me. I didn't know that you had options available.

(Lina Ru, Master's student in the Humanities, UG engineering degree, cited in Badenhorstet al., 2015, p. 7)

I prefer to use 'I argue that…' and 'I maintain that …'. However, I was encouraged to avoid the use of 'I' by one of my assessors who comes from a quantitative paradigm … I managed without it in my dissertation. …. I did feel constrained as I was unable to express certain ideas more comfortably using 'I' which I strongly see as part of the language of qualitative research.

(Diego, PhD student, cited in Botelho de Magalhaes et al., 2019 p. 10)

Social issues

The solitary nature of writing a thesis and its potential for isolation is well-known. International students may be particularly vulnerable in this regard, particularly if their isolation affects their ability to receive and benefit from feedback during the process of writing. Shaw (1991, p. 193) found that the second language thesis writers he interviewed were not making use of 'feedback from colleagues as a resource in the writing process', either for revising or for editing. While, as we have emphasised throughout this chapter, your relationship with your supervisor is very important to successfully completing your thesis, there is growing recognition of the important role that peer support can play in supporting master's and doctoral students' learning (see also Figure 3.4).

Research indicates that peer support groups and group feedback may indeed help not only with combating potential isolation but also assist writing development (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014). Peer support can take a variety of forms, from regular email interactions that help to counter the effects of the impostor syndrome (Watson & Betts, 2010) to monthly face-to-face meetings supplemented by email and phone calls (Devenish et al., 2009). Devenish et al. found that 'collaborative

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peer support has been one of the most valuable enablers to [their] progress' (p. 61). Certainly, public discussion of writing and anxiety associated with writing has been found to reduce students' sense of isolation and inadequacy.

Thesis writing groups are becoming increasingly popular as students experience the benefits of both giving and receiving peer feedback. The graduate office or writing centre at your university may well be offering thesis writing groups. Groups typically consist of a small number of students who meet over several weeks for a couple of hours with a facilitator and read extracts of each other's writing and provide feedback in the course of the group meeting. Studies show that students find talking about writing, giving, and receiving feedback as well as the social connection with others to be very beneficial (see for e.g., Aitchison & Guerin, 2014; Mochizuki, 2019).

In a study of 45 doctoral students, Caffarella and Barnett (2000) found that preparing critiques for their peers and receiving critiques from professors and peers were the most significant elements in helping them to understand the processes of scholarly writing and in improving their academic writing. They conclude that although the processes of learning to give and receive feedback may be stressful, the frustrations are outweighed by the benefits derived from participating in a sustained writing development program which incorporates instruction on how to provide explicit feedback in conjunction with receiving feedback from Faculty members and fellow students.

Your university may also offer thesis writing courses or workshops. We strongly recommend that you attend such courses. In addition to providing useful information about thesis writing, these programs give you an opportunity to meet students from differing disciplines or schools and talk about your research and writing. The social dimension provided by this type of instruction can be almost as important as the writing instruction.

In addition to writing groups and writing courses, many universities are now running regular writing bootcamps (Starfield & Aitchison, 2015). These are typically a weekend event facilitated by writing specialists in which large numbers of students at various stages of writing their thesis come together and sit and write for two or three days. Perhaps surprisingly, students report that the bootcamp experience facilitates writing and they repeatedly sign up for future bootcamps. It may be the absence of distraction and the presence of others focussed on writing that encourages everyone to be productive.

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Other socially oriented writing events like *Shut up and Write!* are also popular on many university campuses. *Shut up and Write!* draws on the *Pomodoro* technique (www.lifehacker.com.au/2014/07/productivity-101-a-primer-to-the-pomodoro-technique/) to encourage regular, timed 'snack' writing; the idea is make writing manageable and become more productive. A good way to run a *Shut Up and Write*! group in your School or Department is to meet once a week in a café, with your laptops, and write for 25 minutes, then take a 10-minute break, have a coffee and chat and then write for another 25 minutes before going on your way. You will be surprised how productive you can be (Mewburn et al., 2014).

Starfield and Aitchison (2015) list five benefits of joining research writing events with others:

- Increased productivity – without a doubt, you'll write more!
- Collegiality – meet new people, have fun, and remove the angst and agony of writing alone.
- Establish local and international networks that can last for years.
- Learn about yourself as a writer – understand how to beat procrastination and push through even the toughest patch.
- Learn writing know-how – take advantage of a wealth of resources and support through linking into associated social media supports.

The types of peer writing activities described above may be available on your campus: don't be afraid to try them out. There is a great deal of support in the virtual world too. We provide information on some of these resources in Chapter 13. As we have argued in this chapter and in Chapter 2, being connected to others is important for successful thesis writing.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined four key issues which can affect the ability of second language writers to successfully complete a thesis. Figure 3.4 provides an overview of key factors identified in this chapter and in academic writing more generally. Not all may appear immediately relevant to writing but there is now a significant body of research, some of it reported on in this chapter, that indicates that emotional, behavioural, and social issues as well as issues of identity in a new

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language and culture can substantially influence a student's capacity to engage in and sustain writing over a lengthy period. Moreover, expectations about the relationship between writers and readers may vary across languages and cultures and may need to be explicitly discussed. It is important that you are aware of the potential for these issues to impact on the production of your thesis.

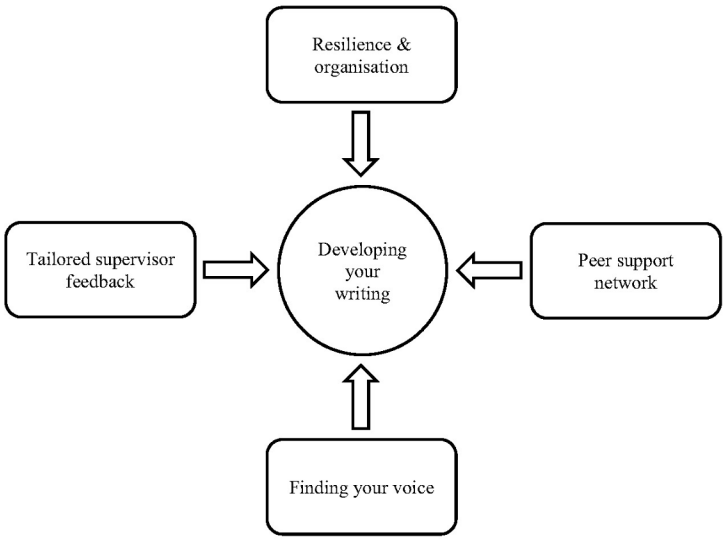

Figure 3.4 Key factors in academic writing development (adapted from Odena & Burgess, 2017, p. 577).