



# Introduction to Academic Writing

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# Introduction to Academic Writing

“It is by writing, even more than by speech, that you actually master your material and extend your own understanding.”

Clanchy, J. & Ballard, B. (1991). *Essay writing for students*. New ed. Melbourne: Longman and Cheshire.



# Objectives for the Lecture

- Identify and describe the major components of the academic writing style
- Describe a process for academic writing
- Outline the structure of an academic essay
- Outline the structure of an academic paragraph
- Identify reasons why it is important to reference sources

# Introducing you ...



- Your name/programme and year of study
- Your level of essay writing experience
- What would you like to learn about academic writing today?



## What kinds of tasks, how much and how often?

- Variety of tasks (reports, essays, case studies, literature reviews, research proposals for example)
- 1200-3000 words (generally at diploma/bachelor level)
- 2-3 major assignments per course



## How will it be marked?

- Content
- Research / reading
- Analysis
- Presentation and referencing



# Academic writing is:

- ▶ **Formal** (impersonal, no slang, formal sentence structure)
- ▶ **Reasoned** (critical thinking: how and why)
- ▶ **Impartial** (gives a balanced point of view, more than one point of view)
- ▶ **Logical** (ideas flow logically from one to another: signposts, topic sentences and linked paragraphs)
- ▶ **Structured** (keeps to the structure of an essay, report etc)
- ▶ **Supported** (evidence and examples, referencing)



# Academic writing is formal

In academic writing we write more formally than usual.

**Exercise: Compare two samples of writing.**

Decide which is a sample of academic writing and which is a sample of informal writing. In pairs, identify the different features of each piece of writing.



# Academic writing is reasoned and impartial

Academic writing is about thinking and reasoning.

***“little evidence of critical thinking”*** is a frequent comment on student work.

## But what is critical thinking?

-thinking well and applying sound intellectual standards to your thinking.

It involves self-evaluation, thinking about your thinking and being sure that you are not jumping to conclusions.



# What does critical thinking involve?

- Assessment of the relationship between claims and the evidence given to support them
- Exercising judgement in order to interpret and evaluate arguments and evidence
- Questioning taken for granted assumptions
- Involves both openness to new ideas and appropriate scepticism



## A critical thinker

Questions and evaluates information, for example:

*What is really important here?*

*How does it relate to what I know already?*

*What standpoint does the writer have?*

*Are there any weaknesses in the argument that is  
being put forward?*

*What other opinions are there on this topic?*

*Do I agree or disagree with the writer?*



# A critical thinker

- does not just accept what s/he reads
- does not simply make assertions
- bases arguments on evidence and sound reasoning
- identifies flaws or weaknesses in an argument
- recognises his or her own assumptions, prejudice or point of view
- develops a reasoned, logical argument

# A critical thinking warm-up

Read the text:

- What do you think about the argument?
- What do you notice about how it has been put together?
- What do you learn from the statistics?
- Are the conclusions appropriate?



# Academic writing is structured

## Essay structure

What are the main parts of an essay?

Introduction

Body

Conclusion

References



**Introduction** usually one paragraph  
explains what you are writing  
about and how you plan to do it

**Body** A series of paragraphs (80-90%)  
of the essay. Gives details/  
evidence to answer the question

**Conclusion** usually one paragraph, briefly  
summarises main ideas and  
shows you have answered the  
question

**References** list of sources you used  
(APA style)



# Exercise – evaluating introductions



# Academic writing is logical

To create a piece of writing that is logical requires planning. There are a number of different approaches that you can use to plan an assignment.

A good way to plan an assignment is to put down your ideas in bullet points using one page (separate from your essay draft). You can also create a 'mindmap' for your ideas or list a series of questions.

***Some time planning out what you want to say before you write your essay will help make your writing more logical and save writing time.***



# Academic writing is logical

*Another key aspect in creating a logical piece of writing is involves writing in paragraphs.*

*A report or essay is made up of a series of related paragraphs.*

**Have a look at the organisation of the writing on the next slide. What do you notice?**



This essay discusses the social and environmental problems associated with the Kaituna River with particular reference to its lower reaches and estuary.

### Tentative paragraphing

This area has been of particular interest in an ecological , economic and spiritual sense for hundreds of years.

Development of this water resource includes its use for food gathering, transportation, recreation, effluent disposal and drainage.

Impacts resulting from usage and control are pollution, a changed ecosystem, an altered landscape and increased human habitation in the immediate vicinity.

This essay covers: the historical value of the river; its changing status of the past 150 years and how the impacts listed above have affected the the river and wildlife during that period.

Rountree, K. (1991). *Writing for success: A practical guide for New Zealand students*. Auckland: Longman Paul.

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# Paragraphs help the reader

Paragraphs break up text into manageable portions. A page is easier to look at when divided into three, four, or five sections. Paragraphs also organise meaning. They help your readers to think clearly about what you have written.

Rountree, K. (1991). *Writing for success: A practical guide for New Zealand students*. Auckland: Longman Paul.

# An academic Paragraph

- a paragraph introduces and develops one main idea
- the main idea is introduced through a **topic sentence**, which is usually the first sentence
- all sentences in the paragraph need to relate to the main idea in a logical way
- paragraphs are linked together and flow logically on from each other
- in-text references need to be included in the paragraph if supporting ideas come from other sources.

Rountree, K. (1991). *Writing for success: A practical guide for New Zealand students*. Auckland: Longman Paul.



# Exercise – Analysing paragraphs

# Some writing pitfalls to avoid

## **1. Avoid addressing the reader directly or using questions**

- For example: “Does this mean that some strategies are better than others?”

## 2. Try not to make generalizations.

For example:

"Everyone agrees that cold calling does not produce results".

While this may be true you can only make such statements if supported with **evidence**.

Instead:

- "According to the Mori Report (2000), cold calling does not produce results.

### 3. OVERLY-LONG SENTENCES

- *A sentence should express only one idea or a clearly connected set of ideas.*
- Home care has been expanding tremendously over the past few years partly due to recent technological advances that enable assessments and treatments to be a part of the home setting which at one time could only be performed within the hospital environment.

X

- Home care has expanded tremendously over the past few years. This increase is partly due to recent technological advances that now make more assessments and treatments possible in the home rather than only in the hospital.

OK

- **4. WORDINESS - *use the minimum number of words.***
- Check your writing to make sure you don't have unnecessary words or phrases.

# Wordiness

You may often find that there are a number of words contained in your writing that can be safely eliminated without any kind of danger to your meaning whatsoever. X

- **You may often find that there are a number of words contained in your writing that can be safely eliminated without any kind of danger to your meaning whatsoever.** (Beer & McMurrey, 2005, p. 34)

Beer, D., & McMurrey, D. (2005). *A guide to writing as an engineer* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

- **Be careful not to use redundant phrases**

For example:

Alternative choices – alternatives

Actual experience - experience

“Various differences” (Various implies difference so you do not need both words)

- **Avoid starting sentences with linking words**

Such as but, and or yet.

Beer, D., & McMurrey, D. (2005). *A guide to writing as an engineer* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons



# Academic writing is supported

**It is important to draw on other sources in your writing.**

## Why do you think this is?

- Using sources strengthens your writing / gives credibility to what you are saying
- Shows you've done research and have synthesized the findings into your own words
- Shows your participating in the intellectual conversation within your discipline



You can incorporate material you read into your own writing by:

- **Quoting** - use the exact words of the author(s). When quoting you usually place the words in quotation marks (“...”)
- **Paraphrasing** – putting the information in your own words
- **Summarising** - express the main points of when it is someone else's opinion, theory or information.

When you incorporate the work of others in your writing you must always reference your sources.



# Using evidence to support your argument

*An assignment of any type must be based on a logical structure which is your own way of analysing the topic.*

## **Exercise**



# Referencing

Referencing is a standard method of acknowledging your sources of information and ideas that you have used in your assignment



# Why do we reference?

- To acknowledge another person's intellectual work
- To make it possible for your reader to locate your sources independently
- To demonstrate your knowledge of your field and make your writing more trustworthy
- To avoid being accused of '**plagiarism**' (using other people's words/ideas as if they were your own)-  
“intellectual kidnapping”



# When a reference isn't required

## When you include information that is:

- **general knowledge** (e.g. that Barack Obama is the President of the U.S.A.)
- information that is **common knowledge in your field**
- **ideas** that are definitely **your own**, and **findings or insights** from **your own research**



# Academic writing is a process

Writing is hard work, it takes time and concentration. Good writers aren't born that way, rather they understand that writing is a process. It can be broken down into stages that make it more manageable.



# Steps in the academic writing process

Analyse the question

Brainstorm ideas

Make a plan to guide research

Do research to get more ideas for your answer

Sort ideas by planning the essay/assignment structure

Write drafts

Prepare references

Edit and proofread



# Analysing assignment questions

**It is important to give your lecturer exactly what he/she asks for.**

If you misunderstand one word in a question it can be enough to throw your assignment right off track.

It helps to pick out the instruction words, the conditions of any instructions and the key content words.



# Analysing questions

Instruction words tell you how to answer the question for example:

Discuss...

Compare and contrast...

Identify...

Evaluate

Conditions make an instruction more specific. For example:

Identify two...

Include examples...

Refer to class work...

Outline briefly..

Key content words give the topic areas that need to be covered in an assignment.



# Lecturers expectations

**Why do you need to think about your lecturer when you are writing your assignments?**



**Good luck with your  
academic writing!**