

An Introduction to Academic Writing

Task 1

Discuss: what is academic writing and how is it different from other kinds of writing, like creative writing for example?

Task 2

Now read this text and see if your ideas agree with the writer's.

What is academic writing?

Academic writing is writing written by students or academics to communicate ideas, information and research, or to show learning (in the case of students).

Student academic writing includes essays, commonly used for formal assessment, research papers, undergraduate dissertations, and theses, such as master's and doctoral works.

Expert academic writing, written by university lecturers and professors, is usually meant for publication in an academic journal or book, and is used to advance the understanding of the subject, and/or the career of the writer. University academics often face a 'publish or die' scenario where they have to publish, or they will not advance in their department. This leads to an excess of poor-quality or even fraudulent research.

Both student and expert academic writing should be written to certain standards which mark this kind of writing as different from other types.

Academic writing is very structured with conventional elements (requirements like needing an abstract, introduction, methods section, literature review, discussion section, conclusion, references etc.), as well as being, ideally, coherently written, with a logical progression through the whole text and through each paragraph. An essay, for example, needs four or five paragraphs; it starts with a clear introduction, has two or three well-structured body paragraphs, and finishes with a clear conclusion.

Academic writing should be based on and supported by objective evidence. The main focus of academic writing is conveyed through noun phrases rather than verb phrases. In your language learning you will have spent a lot of time thinking about verbs; it is now time to really focus on noun phrases. The evidence you will be using may be original research findings but also includes other people's research, which needs to be referenced and cited clearly. You should follow your institution's guidelines for inline citations, footnotes, endnotes and reference list style.

Academic writing should not just describe; the text should analyse and evaluate the information and claims made (by yourself and others). You should be familiar with the

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literature and know what to reference and how to show your attitude towards it. There is a world of difference between these two formulations: *Davies (1999) suggests.....; Davies (1999) suggested.....* You should be critically aware of the issue, data, research, claims, ideas and opinions around the topic of your work.

While you should be critical, you should also be balanced. You should consider all sides of an issue; do not conveniently ignore unhelpful data or ideas, or dismiss a person's research without proper consideration just because you disagree with them. You should show your opinion, or stance, on a particular topic, issue or data set, and carefully hedge or boots your claims about the evidence or data. Compare: *this data clearly indicates....; this data might suggest.....*

Academic writing should be clear and precise. In some disciplines there seems to be a need to hide the lack of academic rigour in the field by the use of jargon, convoluted sentences and opaque meanings which only initiatives in the field will pretend to understand. Your academic writing should prize clarity. You should be careful about the length of your sentences. Make sure your terms are widely understood; only use technical or specialized vocabulary when absolutely necessary, and when you know your reader will understand it. If not, then define your terms.

Academic writing should be more formal than personal letters, most emails, brochures and so on. You should not use contractions like *he's*, or *'till*, or colloquial expressions from spoken English. Sentences will generally be longer than you are used to writing, but not too long that the reader loses the thread of your argument; sentences should be of a Goldilocks length: not too long or too short, just right.

Task 3

Summarise the text.

Academic writing is:

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The Structure of Research Writing

Task 1

What is the structure of a research work?

What elements should it have?

List them here:

- Introduction

Check with your partner.

Task 2

Now put the elements above in order. Discuss the order with your partner.

Task 3

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What is the purpose of each element of the work?

Match the elements (1 – 10) with the purpose (a – l).

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Title | 7. Findings |
| 2. Author name and affiliation | 8. Discussion |
| 3. Abstract | 9. Conclusions |
| 4. Introduction | 10. Acknowledgements |
| 5. Literature review | 11. References |
| 6. Methods | 12. Annexes/Appendices |

- a. This is a list of any sources you have cited in your report, for example in the literature review. Your report should use the standard referencing style preferred by your school or department e.g. Harvard.
- b. This is where you put extra data and information which do not fit in the main body of the text.
- c. This is a summary of the text which people read before they read the whole text. It is a mixture of the context, methods, findings and conclusions.
- d. In a work which includes research you will need to explain how you carried out the research and you should also provide an accurate description of the material and procedures used so that others can replicate the experiment you conducted.
- e. In this section you examine what has been studied on this topic before to show where your research fits in with previous work.
- f. This section should summarise the results of your research and make suggestions for further research or action to be taken.
- g. This section should be an objective summary of what you discovered in your research, and you will use tables, graphs, or figures to describe the most important results and trends.
- h. In this section you explain to the reader what the work is about, why it is important and what is the main question which will be examined.
- i. This should clearly and concisely state the topic of your work.
- j. This section should include information about the background to your research, and what its aims and objectives are. You can also briefly refer to the literature and identify the gaps in understanding which you might be addressing.
- k. Here you are expected to critically evaluate your findings. This includes assessing the accuracy and significance of your findings, and show how they fit in the context of the previous research discussed in your literature review.
- l. Who wrote the report and where do they work or study?

Task 4

Now go online and find a research essay or academic article. Which of these elements from above does it have? Identify useful language from each section.

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Writing an Introduction

Task 1

What is the purpose of the introduction?

Think of it in these terms: What reader questions does the introduction answer?

Write your ideas here.

Check your ideas with your partner.

Task 2a

Look at this example of an introduction. What is the purpose of each paragraph? What question does each sentence answer?

This paper examines the controversial ideas of Chomsky's innatist theory of language learning and the second language learning theory of Krashen.

Chomsky's work has been enormously '*influential*' within linguistics since the middle of last century, while Krashen's theories, themselves applications of Chomsky's theories, have also been a significant influence in the field of second language acquisition since the 1980's.

Much of Chomsky's work is based the 'logical' problem of language learning and the poverty of stimulus argument. This crucial argument will be examined then Chomsky's impact on learning theory will be briefly considered.

Krashen's hypotheses will be considered closely for their intellectual rigour and usefulness in understanding second language acquisition.

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Task 2b

Your introduction should address three questions: What, why, and how?

What?

Be specific about the topic of the paper, introduce the background, and define key terms or concepts.

Why?

Tell your reader: What new material or insight are you offering?

Or What important issues does your essay help define or answer?

How?

Tell the reader what to expect from the rest of the paper: briefly present the key elements of the paper in chronological order.

Now, review the introduction in 2a. What question does each paragraph answer? Is it a 'good' introduction?

Task 3

Now go online and find 3 - 5 examples of introductions to research reports.

Study the structure.

Look for useful language.

Task 4

Present your examples to the class.

Highlight the structure of the extracts and useful language you identified.

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Writing Paragraphs

Task 1a

Read the paragraph. What is the paragraph about? Is it a good paragraph?

Ernest Miller Hemingway was an American novelist, short-story writer, journalist, and sportsman. His wartime experiences formed the basis for his novel *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). Hemingway was raised in Oak Park, Illinois. In 1918, he was seriously wounded and returned home. After high school, he was a reporter for a few months for *The Kansas City Star* before leaving for the Italian Front to enlist as an ambulance driver in World War I.

Task 1b

Rewrite the paragraph so it is better. What did you change?

Task 1c

What is the topic of each sentence?

What do we learn about the topic in the sentence?

What is the sequence of topics? Write them here:

Topic 1:

Topic 2:

Topic 3:

Topic 4:

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Analysis

Topic	Comment
Ernest Miller Hemingway	was an American novelist, short-story writer, journalist, and sportsman.
Hemingway	was raised in Oak Park, Illinois.
he	After high school, (he) was a reporter for a few months for The Kansas City Star before leaving for the Italian Front to enlist as an ambulance driver in World War I.
he	In 1918, he was seriously wounded and returned home.
His wartime experience	formed the basis for his novel A Farewell to Arms (1929).

Task 2a

What is the purpose of each of these possible elements of an essay paragraph?

1. Topic sentence
2. Evidence
3. Example(s)
4. Explanation of the example(s)
5. Closing

Task 2b

Read this paragraph. What elements from 2a can you find?

Pinker (1994) claims that: *'a three-year-old, then, is a grammatical genius – master of most constructions, obeying rules far more than flouting them, respecting language universals, erring in sensible, adult-like ways and avoiding many kinds of error altogether.'* (p. 276) This, however, is more hyperbole than truth. Three-year olds are not masters of *most* constructions. Indeed, this quote itself suggests that they are not even 'master' of those constructions they do know; 'obeying rules far more than flouting them' is not mastery by any accepted understanding of the term. Numerous researchers have shown that many grammatical features are acquired later (e.g. Carol Chomsky, 1969; Hildebrand, 1987, Mazurkewich and White, 1984).

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Task 2c

What is the purpose of the words in bold?

Pinker (1994) claims that: '*a three-year-old, then, is a grammatical genius – master of most constructions, obeying rules far more than flouting them, respecting language universals, erring in sensible, adult-like ways and avoiding many kinds of error altogether.*' (p. 276) **This**, however, is more hyperbole than truth. **Three-year olds** are not masters of *most* constructions. **Indeed, this** quote itself suggests that they are not even 'master' of those constructions they do know; 'obeying rules far more than flouting them' is not mastery by any accepted understanding of the term. Numerous researchers have shown that many grammatical features are acquired later (e.g. Carol Chomsky, 1969; Hildebrand, 1987, Mazurkewich and White, 1984).

Task 2d

Read this paragraph from an essay about the writer Tom Wolfe. What is the paragraph about? Can you identify the elements from 2a in the paragraph?

Time has proven Wolfe right even if he had “no eye,” as Paul Goldberger declared, and even if his aesthetic theories were, as Robert Hughes asserted, “dumbly simple.” His acuity as a social historian allowed him to identify the means by which financial instruments came to penetrate an art world already well lubricated by theory. It is the successfully completed business deal, which has nothing to do with aesthetics as traditionally conceived, that validates the NFT* as an artwork. This confirms Wolfe’s observation that the modern public has no role in determining aesthetic value. That power now rests with those who can shell out six- or even nine-figure sums to buy artworks, after which the critics can invent theories to instruct the populace on how to enjoy such unappetizing fare as *Everydays*, or CryptoPunks, or Bored Apes. “The public,” as Wolfe put it, “are merely tourists, autograph seekers, gawkers, parade watchers, so far as the game of Success in Art is concerned.”

***NFT** = Non-fungible token; a digital asset that represents real-world objects like art, music, in-game items and videos

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Task 2e

What is the topic of each sentence?

What do we learn about the topic in each sentence?

What is the sequence of topics? Write them here:

Topic 1:

Topic 2:

Topic 3:

Topic 4:

Topic 5:

Topic 6:

Task 2f

What is the purpose or meaning of the words in **bold**?

Time has proven Wolfe right even if **he** had “no eye,” as Paul Goldberger declared, and even if **his** aesthetic theories were, as Robert Hughes asserted, “dumbly simple.” **His** acuity as a social historian allowed **him** to identify the means by which financial instruments came to penetrate an art world already well lubricated by theory. **It** is the successfully completed business deal, which has nothing to do with aesthetics as traditionally conceived, that validates the NFT as an artwork. **This** confirms Wolfe’s observation that the modern public has no role in determining aesthetic value. **That** power now rests with those who can shell out six- or even nine-figure sums to buy artworks, after which the critics can invent theories to instruct the populace on how to enjoy such unappetizing fare as *Everydays*, or CryptoPunks, or Bored Apes. “**The public**,” as Wolfe put it, “are merely tourists, autograph seekers, gawkers, parade watchers, so far as the game of Success in Art is concerned.”

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Task 3

Now go online and find 3 - 5 examples of paragraphs from a research report.

Study the structure of each paragraph.

What elements from 2a can you find?

What is the topic/comment structure of the paragraph?

What referencing devices are used?

Look for useful language you can use yourself.

Task 4

Present your examples to the class.

Highlight the structure of the extracts and useful language you identified.

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Citing Others

Task 1

Citing others is when we say who wrote or said something. We do this to acknowledge our sources. Why is this important to do?

Task 2a

In this paragraph two different ways of citing are shown.

Pinker (1994) claims that: *'a three-year-old, then, is a grammatical genius – master of most constructions, obeying rules far more than flouting them, respecting language universals, erring in sensible, adult-like ways and avoiding many kinds of error altogether.'* (p. 276) This, however, is more hyperbole than truth. Three-year olds are not masters of *most* constructions. Indeed this quote itself suggests that they are not even 'master' of those constructions they do know. Numerous researchers have shown that many grammatical features are acquired later (e.g. Carol Chomsky, 1969; Hildebrand, 1987, Mazurkewich and White, 1984).

When we cite others we have choices to make. We can quote them directly, and when we do this we need to cite the exact page number. We can list them as having studied or thought something, as in the last sentence above. Or we can paraphrase when they said, as in the example below:

Chomsky claimed, in his seminal attack on behaviourism (Chomsky, 1959) that behaviourist explanations of learning (through imitation and positive and negative reinforcement of habits) were mistaken. He later argued that children must have an innate ability, even an innate knowledge of grammar in order for them to learn the language at all.

What is missing from the paragraph above?

Task 2b

When we cite others through paraphrasing or quoting, we need to choose an appropriate verb. Check you know the meaning of these verbs:

1. state
2. suggest
3. think
4. argue
5. claim
6. discover
7. study

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Task 2c

Which of these verbs can go in these sentences?

1. Jones (1999) _____ that all people think this way.
2. Smith and Butcher (2015) _____ that only 10% of people hold this opinion.
3. Johnson (1956) _____ people's reactions to electric stimuli.

Task 2d

What is the difference?

1. Jones (1999) claims that all people think this way.
2. Jones (1999) claimed that all people think this way.

We use our choice of verb to show our opinion of, or attitude to, the research we are citing. We can show whether we think the research is dated, out-of-date, wrong or mistaken, or still current, interesting, worth taking seriously through our choice of verb.

Task 3

Now go online and find 10 examples of in-line citations from a research report.

Study how the works are cited.

Which verbs are used? Why?

Look for useful language you can use yourself.

Task 4

Present your examples to the class.

Highlight the structure of the extracts and useful language you identified.

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Presenting and Discussing Data

Task 1

What different ways can we present quantities of data in research essays:

Write your ideas here:

e.g. table

Task 2a

We use tables or figures to present a lot of data. In our text we do not have to describe the data *in detail*.

We should refer to the data, saying what the table, chart, graph or figure shows:

Cook and Newson (1996) states that there are four stages to this argument, as summarised in Table 1 below.

Step A	A native speaker of a particular language knows a particular aspect of syntax
Step B	This aspect of syntax could not have been acquired from the language typically available to children.
Step C	This aspect of syntax is not learnt from outside
Step D	This aspect of syntax is built-in to the mind

Table 1 The Poverty of the Stimulus argument

Each graph or table etc. should be clearly labelled and numbered.

We should also be able to focus our reader's attention to **the most important or significant data** presented in the tables or figures.

Task 2c

Complete sentences about the following tables and figures.

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Word List	Types	Tokens
A1	69 (29.11%)	248 (51.35%)
A2	25 (10.55%)	35 (7.25%)
B1	43 (18.14%)	67 (13.87%)
B2	40 (16.88%)	49 (10.14%)
C1	9 (3.80%)	11 (2.28%)
C2	8 (3.38%)	8 (1.66%)
Unlisted	43 (18.14%)	65 (13.46%)

Table 1 Word Frequency Data for Text A

Table 1 _____.

Almost 70% of words _____.

Both C1 and C2 words make up under _____ percent of the text.

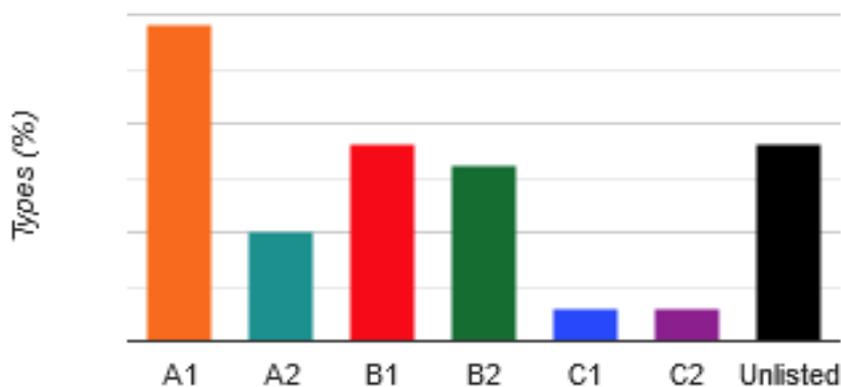


Figure 1 Graph of Frequency Data for Text A

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Figure 1 _____.

A1 words _____.

The higher bands, C1 and C2 are _____.



CEFR level	Number of words	% of total
A1	288	60 %
A2	67	14 %
B1	31	6 %
B2	34	7 %
C1	16	3 %
Unclassified	43	9 %

Figure 2 Text A Words Categorised by CEFR Level

Figure 2 _____.

Seventy-four percent of words in Text A _____.

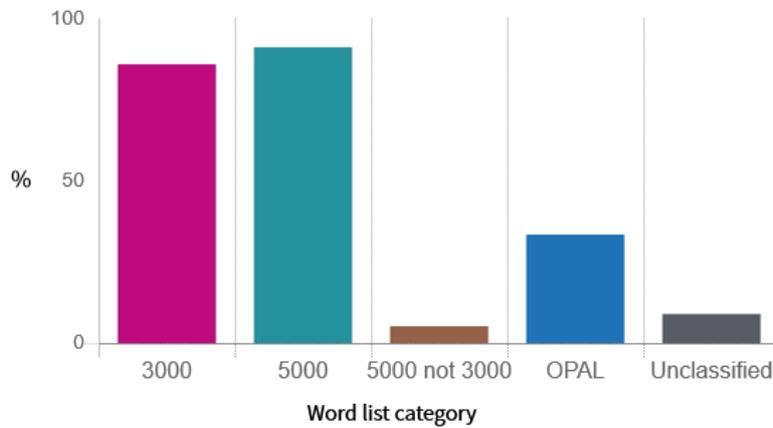


Figure 3 Text A Word Category List

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Figure 3 _____.

Over eighty percent of words in Text A _____.

Category	Number of words	% of total
■ Oxford 3000	411	86 %
■ Oxford 5000	436	91 %
■ Oxford 5000 excluding Oxford 3000	25	5 %
■ OPAL written words	160	33 %
■ Unclassified	43	9 %

Total words	479	

Total sentences	25	

Average sentence length (words)	19.2	

Table 2 Text A Word Categories

Table 2 _____.

Of the 479 words in Text A _____ (411 words) _____ and _____ (25 words) _____.

Task 3

Now go online and find 3 - 5 examples of different presentations of data in a research report.

Study how the data is presented and how it is discussed in the text.

Look for useful language you can use yourself.

Task 4

Present your examples to the class.

Highlight the structure of the extracts and useful language you identified.

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Writing a Conclusion

Task 1

What is the purpose of the conclusion?

Think of it in these terms: What reader questions does the conclusion answer?

Write your ideas here.

Check your ideas with your partner.

Task 2a

Reminder, re-read this introduction to a paper.

This paper examines the controversial ideas of Chomsky's innatist theory of language learning and the second language learning theory of Krashen.

Chomsky's work has been enormously '*influential*' within linguistics since the middle of last century, while Krashen's theories, themselves applications of Chomsky's theories, have also been a significant influence in the field of second language acquisition since the 1980's.

Much of Chomsky's work is based the 'logical' problem of language learning and the poverty of stimulus argument. This crucial argument will be examined then Chomsky's impact on learning theory will be briefly considered.

Krashen's hypotheses will be considered closely for their intellectual rigour and usefulness in understanding second language acquisition.

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Task 2b

Look at this example of a conclusion. What is the purpose of each paragraph?

Both Chomsky and Krashen have both produced theories that have divided their professional audiences. Chomsky created a new school of linguistic studies which carved out its own role of examining a Universal Grammar. Krashen applied the theoretical LAD to a second language learning theory associated with his name. Each has their adherents and their critics.

By examining their work more closely it can be seen that there are weaknesses. Chomsky's theory of innateness rests on the shaky foundations of several theoretical assertions about the impossibility of children learning from language input alone. By posing this as a 'logical problem' Chomsky hides the fact that it is not as logical as one might suppose.

Similarly, Krashen developed a theory grounded in an unproven assertion of Chomsky's that there is a language acquisition device. But by going further than Chomsky, Krashen found himself having to develop other hypotheses to protect his central assertion that the language acquisition device was still central to adult learning.

In both cases theories have been built on ideas rather than evidence, by 'homework linguists' (Beaugrande, 1997). These theories are known as *causal-process* theories rather than *set-of-laws theories* (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991). Larsen-Freeman and Long criticise Krashen's hypotheses for being unfalsifiable and thus any claims of being tested and of classroom prescriptions should be subject to 'close scrutiny' (ibid: p 225). It is also interesting to note that they cite Reynolds (1971) as saying that such theories are 'associated with paradigm shifts' (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991: p 226) as indeed Chomsky's work was.

Both Chomsky and Krashen's work is, to put it mildly, 'less 'bound by data'' (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991: p 226) than might be hoped and bearing in mind the fact that theoreticians, once having invested time and prestige in such theories, are reluctant or perhaps incapable of changing them (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991), language learning and second language acquisition is going to have to look elsewhere for better theories, not to Chomsky or Krashen.

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Task 2b Which bullet points are true?

The conclusion is used to:

- help your reader leave the paper's argument by summing up the argument
- show what you discussed during the paper
- show how you proved your thesis statement
- show how you have settled the issues raised in the introduction
- discuss the more general consequences of the argument
- outline any questions the paper raised but could not answer.

Task 3

Now go online and find 3 - 5 examples of conclusions.

Study the structure of the conclusion.

Look for useful language you can use yourself.

Task 4

Present your examples to the class.

Highlight the structure of the extracts and useful language you identified.

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References

Task 1

References list the books or articles or web sources which are cited in the text of the essay.

Study this reference list and answer these questions.

1. How is the list organised?
2. Which name comes first -surname or first name?
3. What is in brackets?
4. What is the title of de Beaugrande (1997)?
5. If an author is cited more than once, what is the order?
6. Who published Lightbrow and Spada (1999)?
7. Where was Lightbrow and Spada (1999) published?
8. Where did Chomsky, C. (1969) appear?
9. In which journal was Hildebrand (1987) published?
10. What does (eds) mean?

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Task 2

Go online and find a guide to the Harvard referring system.

Compare the Harvard system to the references above. What are the differences?

Task 3

Now go online and find 3 different examples of a list of references.

What are the differences?

Task 4

Present your examples to the class.

Highlight the differences in the reference styles.

Choose which reference style you will use.