

Academic Writing

Academic writing is clear, concise, focused, structured and backed up by evidence. Its purpose is to aid the reader's understanding.

It has a formal tone and style, but it is not complex and does not require the use of long sentences and complicated vocabulary.

Each subject discipline will have certain writing conventions, vocabulary and types of discourse that you will become familiar with over the course of your degree. However, there are some general characteristics of academic writing that are relevant across all disciplines.

Characteristics of academic writing

- ◇ Academic writing is:
- ◇ **Planned and focused:** answers the question and demonstrates an understanding of the subject.
- ◇ **Structured:** is coherent, written in a logical order, and brings together related points and material.
- ◇ **Evidenced:** demonstrates knowledge of the subject area, supports opinions and arguments with evidence, and is referenced accurately.
- ◇ **Formal in tone and style:** uses appropriate language and tenses, and is clear, concise and balanced.

- ◆ The first step to writing academically is to clearly define the purpose of the writing and the audience.
- ◆ Most formal academic writing at university is set by, and written for, an academic tutor or assessor, and there should be clear criteria against which they will mark your work.
- ◆ You will need to spend some time interpreting your question and deciding how to tackle your assignment.
- ◆ If you are writing for yourself – for example making notes to record or make sense of something – then you can set your own criteria such as clarity, brevity, and relevance.
- ◆ Once you have a clear idea of what is required for your assignment, you can start planning your research and gathering evidence.

Structure your work

- ◆ Once you have a plan for your writing, you can use this plan to create the structure of your writing. Structured writing has a beginning, middle and an end, and uses focused paragraphs to develop the argument.

Create the overall structure

- ◆ Some academic writing, such as lab or business reports, will have a fairly rigid structure, with headings and content for each section. In other formats, writing usually follows the same overall structure: introduction, main body and conclusion.
- ◆ The introduction outlines the main direction the writing will take, and gives any necessary background information and context.
- ◆ In the main body each point is presented, explored and developed. These points must be set out in a logical order, to make it easier for the reader to follow and understand.
- ◆ The conclusion brings together the main points, and will highlight the key message or argument you want the reader to take away. It may also identify any gaps or weaknesses in the arguments or ideas presented, and recommend further research or investigation where appropriate.

Arrange your points in a logical order

- ◆ When you start writing you should have a clear idea of what you want to say. Create a list of your main points and think about what the reader needs to know and in what order they will need to know it. To select the main points you want to include, ask yourself whether each point you have considered really contributes to answering the question. Is the point relevant to your overall argument?
- ◆ Select appropriate evidence that you will use to support each main point. Think carefully about which evidence to use, you must evaluate that information as not everything you find will be of high quality.
- ◆ See our searching for information page for advice on how to find high quality, academic information.
- ◆ Grouping your points may help you create a logical order. These groups will broadly fit into an overall pattern, such as for and against, thematic, chronological or by different schools of thought or approach.
- ◆ You can then put these groups into a sequence that the reader can follow and use to make sense of the topic or argument. It may be helpful to talk through your argument with someone.
- ◆ It may be helpful to arrange ideas initially in the form of a mind-map, which allows you to develop key points with supporting information branching off.
- ◆ Mind View software (available on ekb website) allows you to create an essay structure where you can add in pictures, files and attachments – perfect for organizing evidence to support your point.

Write in structured paragraphs

- ◆ Use paragraphs to build and structure your argument, and separate each of your points into a different paragraph.
- ◆ Make your point clear in the first or second sentence of the paragraph to help the reader to follow the line of reasoning.
- ◆ The rest of the paragraph should explain the point in greater detail, and provide relevant evidence and examples where necessary or useful. Your interpretation of this evidence will help to substantiate your thinking and can lend weight to your argument.
- ◆ At the end of the paragraph you should show how the point you have made is significant to the overall argument or link to the next paragraph.

Use signaling words when writing

Using signaling words will help the reader to understand the structure of your work and where you might be taking your argument.

Use signaling words to:

- ◆ add more information eg. furthermore, moreover, additionally
- ◆ compare two similar points eg. similarly, in comparison
- ◆ show contrasting viewpoints eg. however, in contrast, yet
- ◆ show effect or conclusion eg. therefore, consequently, as a result
- ◆ emphasize eg. significantly, particularly
- ◆ reflect sequence eg. first, second, finally.

Revise, edit and proofread your work

Most writing will require several drafts and revisions in order to improve the clarity and structure. It is rare that a writer will make the very best decisions in the first draft.

[Grammarly](#) or [Paper Rater](#) are useful tools that will spot mistakes in your writing and offer suggestions to correct them. Paper Rater is particularly useful for identifying trends in your writing style, for example using the same words frequently, or having overly long or short sentences.