

The process of writing an essay

The following procedure is useful when writing an extended essay or assignment.

	Task	Skills Needed	Product
1.	Read the question and understand what you are required to do. Think about the subject, the purpose and the audience.	thinking academically	Essay subject.
2.	Think about what you know about the subject. Write it down in some way.	brainstorming	Diagrams or notes.
3.	Go to the library and find relevant books or articles.	library/research skills	Reading list.
4.	Find the books on your reading list and study them.	reading skills: skimming and scanning	List of materials studied.
5.	Make notes on these books and articles. Record full details of the materials you use.	reading in detail selecting & note-taking paraphrasing/summarising	Notes.
6.	Organise your essay/assignment.	planning organisation	Essay plan.
7.	Type or write your first draft.	writing from notes synthesis writing paragraphs typing/word-processing	First draft.
8.	Discuss your first draft informally with friends, other members of your class and your lecturer if possible.	speaking skills listening skills discussion skills	List of revisions/changes.

9.	Revise your first draft, bearing in mind any comments that were made in your discussions. Go back to 2. if necessary Produce your second draft.	use of dictionaries & reference books writing introduction & conclusion quoting/writing a list of references	Second draft.
10.	Proofread your draft.	checking for spelling mistakes checking punctuation and grammar checking vocabulary use checking style checking organisation, references etc. checking for plagiarism	Assignment with changes marked.
11.	Produce a final typed version.	typing/word-processing writing title/contents page	Final assignment.
12.	Check everything.	final check	Hand in.

Your essay should have the following sections:

Preliminaries	Title page
Main text	Introduction
	Main body
	Conclusion
End matter	References



The essay

English essays are linear:



- they start at the beginning and finish at the end, with every part contributing to the main line of argument, without digressions or repetition. Writers are responsible for making their line of argument clear and presenting it in an orderly fashion so that the reader can follow. Each paragraph discusses one major point and each paragraph should lead directly to the next. The paragraphs are tied together with an introduction and a conclusion.

An essay has three main parts

1. An introduction
2. A main body
3. A conclusion

1. The introduction.

The introduction consists of two parts:

- a. It should include a few general statements about the subject to provide a background to your essay and to attract the reader's attention. It should try to explain why you are writing the essay. It may include a definition of terms in the context of the essay, etc.
- b. It should also include a statement of the specific subdivisions of the topic and/or indication of how the topic is going to be tackled in order to specifically address the question.

It should introduce the central idea or the main purpose of the writing. It should address the question.

2. The main body.

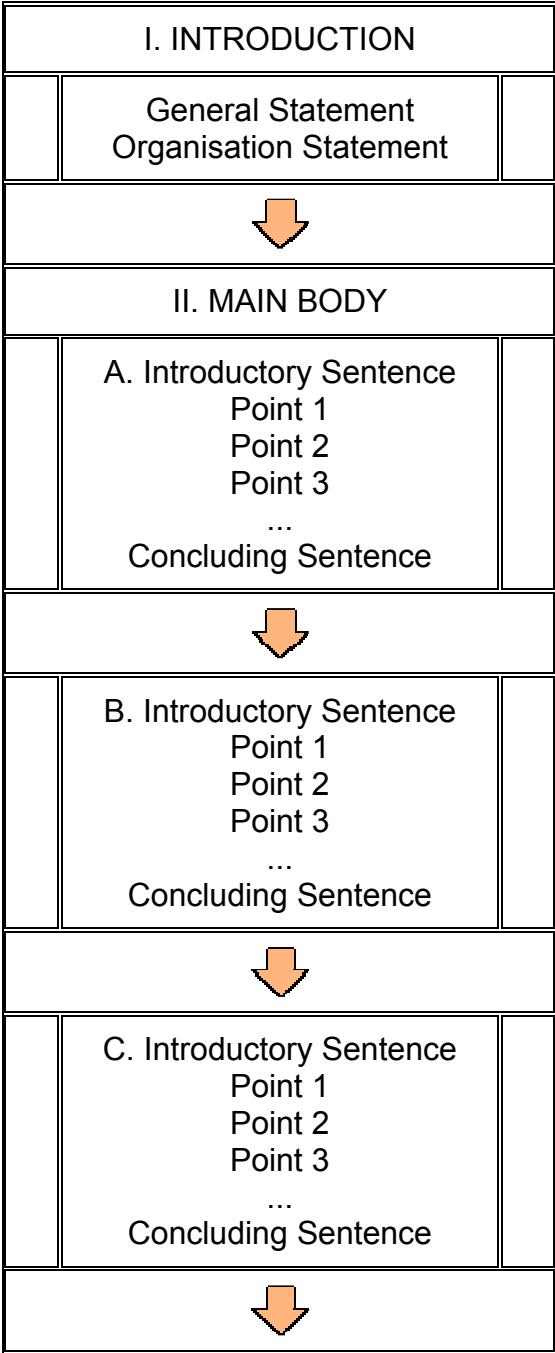
The main body consists of one or more paragraphs of ideas and arguments. Each paragraph develops a subdivision of the topic. The paragraphs of the essay contain the main ideas and arguments of the essay together with illustrations or examples. The paragraphs are linked in order to connect the ideas. The purpose of the essay must be made clear and the reader must be able to follow its development.

3. The conclusion.

The conclusion includes the writer’s final points.

- a. It should recall the issues raised in the introduction and draw together the points made in the main body
- b. and explain the overall significance of the conclusions. What general points can be drawn from the essay as a whole?

It should clearly signal to the reader that the essay is finished and leave a clear impression that the purpose of the essay has been achieved, and that the question has been answered.



III. CONCLUSION	
	Recall issues in introduction; draw together main points; final comment.

Writing a list of references

At the end of all pieces of academic writing, you need a list of materials that you have used or referred to. This usually has a heading: *references* but may be *bibliography* or *works cited* depending on the conventions of the system you use.

The object of your writing is for you to say something for yourself using the ideas of the subject, for you to present ideas you have learned in your own way. The emphasis should be on working with other people's ideas, rather than reproducing their words. The ideas and people that you refer to need to be made explicit by a system of referencing. This consists of a list of materials that you have used at the end of the piece of writing and references to this list at various points throughout the essay. The purpose of this is to supply the information needed to allow a user to find a source.

Therefore, at the end of your assignment you need a list of the materials you have used - a bibliography or a reference list.

There are many ways of writing a list of references - check with your department for more information - but the one used here - the American Psychological Association style - is well known and often used (American Psychological Association, 1983, 1994, 1999, 2001). See Gibaldi (1999) and Modern Languages Association (1998) for another way.

1. Example

References

- Abercrombie, D. (1968). Paralanguage. *British Journal of Disorders of Communication*, 3, 55-59.
- Barr, P., Clegg, J. & Wallace, C. (1981). *Advanced reading skills*. London: Longman.
- Chomsky, N. (1973). Linguistic theory. In J. W. Oller & J. C. Richards (Eds.), *Focus on the learner* (pp. 29-35). Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House.
- Fromkin, V. & Rodman, R. (1983). *An introduction to language*. London: Holt-Saunders.
- Guiora, A. Z., Paluszny, M., Beit-Hallahmi, B., Catford, J. C., Cooley, R. E. & Dull, C. Y. (1975). Language and person: Studies in language behaviour. *Language Learning*, 25, 43-61.

- GVU's 8th WWW user survey*. (n.d.). Retrieved August 8, 2000, from <http://www.cc.gatech.edu/gvu/usersurveys/survey1997-10/>
- Kinsella, V. (Ed.). (1978). *Language teaching and linguistics: Surveys*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lipinsky, E. & Bender, R. (1980). Critical voices on the economy. *Survey*, 25, 38-42.
- Oller, J. W. & Richards, J. C. (Eds.). (1973). *Focus on the learner*. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House.
- Longman dictionary of contemporary English*. (1978). London: Longman.
- Smith, F. (1978). *Reading*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stern, H. H. & Weinrib, A. (1978). Foreign languages for younger children: Trends and assessment. In V. Kinsella (Ed.), *Language teaching and linguistics: Surveys* (pp. 152-172). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

NOTES

Use heading: **References**.

Page numbers should be included for all articles in journals and in collections.

Use *italics* (or underlining in handwriting) for titles of books, periodicals, newspapers etc.

Use alphabetical order. Alphabetise works with no author by the first significant word in the title.

All co-authors should be listed.

Indent second etc. lines

Use (n.d.) if no date is given.

If the author of a document is not given, begin the reference with the title of the document.



2. Books

a. One author:

Smith, F. (1978). *Reading*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

b. Two authors:

Fromkin, V. & Rodman, R. (1983). *An introduction to language*. London: Holt-Saunders.

c. More than two authors:

Barr, P., Clegg, J. & Wallace, C. (1981). *Advanced reading skills*. London: Longman.

d. Edited collections:

Kinsella, V. (Ed.). (1978). *Language teaching and linguistics: Surveys*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Oller, J. W. & Richards, J. C. (Eds.). (1973). *Focus on the learner*. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House.

e. Book, corporate author:

British Council Teaching Information Centre. (1978). *Pre-sessional courses for overseas students*. London: British Council.

f. Book, no author, or editor:

Longman dictionary of contemporary English. (1978). London: Longman.
The Times atlas of the world (5th ed.). (1975). New York: New York Times.

g. Book, third edition:

Fromkin, V. & Rodman, R. (1983). *An introduction to language* (3rd ed.). London: Holt-Saunders.

h. Book, revised edition:

Cohen, J. (1977). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioural sciences* (rev. ed.). New York: Plenum Press.

i. Non-English book:

Piaget, J. & Inhelder, B. (1951). *La genèse de l'idée de hasard chez l'enfant* [The origin of the idea of danger in the child]. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

j. English translation of a book:

Luria, A. R. (1969). *The mind of a mnemonist* (L. Solotaroff, Trans.). New York: Avon Books. (Original work published 1965)

k. Books or articles, two or more by the same author in the same year:

Lyons, J. (1981a). *Language and linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Lyons, J. (1981b). *Language, meaning and context*. London: Fontana.



3. Periodical articles

a. One author:

Abercrombie, D. (1968). Paralinguage. *British Journal of Disorders of Communication*, 3, 55-59.

b. Two authors:

Lipinsky, E. & Bender, R. (1980). Critical voices on the economy. *Survey*, 25, 38-42.

c. More than two authors:

Guiora, A. Z., Paluszny, M., Beit-Hallahmi, B., Catford, J. C., Cooley, R. E. & Dull, C. Y. (1975). Language and person: Studies in language behaviour. *Language Learning*, 25, 43-61.

d. Review of a book:

Carmody, T. P. (1982). A new look at medicine from a social perspective [Review of the book *Social contexts of health, illness and patient care*]. *Contemporary Psychology*, 27, 208-209.

e. Review of a book, no title:

Maley, A. (1994). [Review of the book *Critical language awareness*]. *Applied Linguistics*, 15, 348-350.

f. Magazine article:

Gardner, H. (1981, December). Do babies sing a universal song? *Psychology Today*, 70-76.

g. Newspaper article:

James, R. (1991, December 15). Obesity affects economic social status. *The Guardian*, p. 18

h. Newspaper/Magazine article, no author:

Acid attack 'scarred girl for life'. (1986, October 21). *The Guardian*, p. 4.
(In the essay use a short form of the title for citation: ("Acid Attack." 1986))

i. Newspaper article, letter to the editor:

Hain, P. (1986, October 21). The police protection that women want [Letter to the editor]. *The Guardian*, p. 4.

j. Journal article, in press:

Johns, A. M. (in press) Written argumenation for real audiences. *TESOL Quarterly*.



4. Selections from edited collections

a. One author:

Chomsky, N. (1973). Linguistic theory. In J. W. Oller & J. C. Richards (Eds.), *Focus on the learner* (pp. 29-35). Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House.

b. Two authors:

Stern, H. H. & Weinrib, A. (1978). Foreign languages for younger children: Trends and assessment. In V. Kinsella (Ed.), *Language teaching and linguistics: Surveys* (pp. 152-172). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



5. CD ROMs etc

a. Newspaper or magazine on CD-ROM:

Gardner, H. (1981, December). Do babies sing a universal song? *Psychology Today* [CD-ROM], pp. 70-76.

b. Abstract on CD-ROM:

Meyer, A. S. & Bock, K. (1992). The tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon: Blocking or partial activation? [CD-ROM]. *Memory Cognition*, 20, 715-726. Abstract from: SilverPlatter File: PsycLIT Item: 80-16351

c. Article from CD-ROM Encyclopedia:

Crime. (1996). In *Microsoft Encarta 1996 Encyclopedia* [CD-ROM]. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation.

d. Dictionary on CD-ROM:

Oxford English dictionary computer file: On compact disc (2nd ed.) [CD-ROM]. (1992). Oxford: Oxford University Press.



6. Documents obtained from the Internet

All references begin with the same information that would be provided for a printed source (or as much of that information as possible). The WWW information is then placed at the end of the reference in the same way as publishing information is given for books. It is important to give the date of retrieval because documents on the Web may change in content, move, or be removed from a site altogether. The object of this is the same as all referencing - to supply the information needed to allow a user to find a source. If you do not know the author or the date and it does not have a clear title, think carefully before using it. See Evaluating Sources.

a. An article:

Jacobson, J. W., Mulick, J. A. Schwartz, A. A. (1995). A history of facilitated communication: Science, pseudoscience, and antiscience: Science working group on

facilitated communication. *American Psychologist*, 50, 750-765. Retrieved January 25, 1996, from <http://www.apa.org/journals/jacobson.html>

b. A newspaper article:

Sleek, S. (1996, January). Psychologists build a culture of peace. *APA Monitor*, pp. 1, 33 [Newspaper, selected stories on-line]. Retrieved January 25, 1996, from <http://www.apa.org/monitor/peacea.html>

c. WWW Document:

Li, X. & Crane, N. (1996, May 20). *Bibliographic formats for citing electronic information*. Retrieved March 10, 1997, from <http://www.uvm.edu/~xli/reference/estyles.html>

d. WWW Document - corporate author:

World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). (1995, May 15). *About the World Wide Web*. Retrieved December 30, 1996, from <http://www.w3.org/hypertext/WWW/>

e. WWW Document - corporate author:

American Psychological Association (1996). *How to cite information from the world wide web*. Retrieved March 17, 1997, from <http://www.apa.org/journals/webref.html>

f. WWW Document - no author:

A field guide to sources on, about and on the Internet: Citation formats. (1995, Dec 18). Retrieved February 7th, 1996, from <http://www.cc.emory.edu/WHSCS/citation.formats.html>

g. WWW Document - no author, no date:

GVU's 8th WWW user survey. (n.d.). Retrieved August 8, 2000, from <http://www.cc.gatech.edu/gvu/usersurveys/survey1997-10/>

h. An abstract:

Rosenthal, R. (1995). State of New Jersey v. Margaret Kelly Michaels: An overview [Abstract]. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 1, 247-271. Retrieved January 25, 1996, from <http://www.apa.org/journals/ab1.html>



7. Others

a. Government report:

National Institute of Mental Health. (1982). *Television and behaviour: Ten years of scientific progress and implications for the eighties* (DHHS Publication No. ADM82-1195). Washington DC: US Government Printing Office.

b. Publication with no date given:

Malachi, Z. (Ed.). (n.d.) *Proceedings of the International Conference on Literary and Linguistic Computing*. Tel Aviv: Faculty of Humanities, Tel Aviv University.

c. Unpublished dissertation or thesis:

Devins, G. M. (1981). *Helplessness, depression, and mood in end-stage renal disease*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, McGill University, Montreal.

d. Unpublished conference paper:

Howarth, P. (1995, March). *Phraseological standards in EAP*. Paper presented at the meeting of the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes, Nottingham.

e. Film or videotape:

Maas, J. B. (Producer), and Gluck, D. H. (Director). (1979). *Deeper into hypnosis* [Film]. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

a) Reporting

This simply means reporting the other writer's ideas into your own words. You can either paraphrase if you want to keep the length the same or summarise if you want to make the text shorter. See Reporting: Paraphrase & Summary for more information. There are two main ways (Swales, 1990, p. 148) of showing that you have used another writer's ideas:

integral

According to Peters (1983) evidence from first language acquisition indicates that lexical phrases are learnt first as unanalysed lexical chunks.
Evidence from first language acquisition indicating that lexical phrases are learnt first as unanalysed lexical chunks was given by Peters (1983).

OR *non-integral*

Evidence from first language acquisition (Peters, 1983) indicates that lexical phrases are learnt first as unanalysed lexical chunks.
Lexical phrases are learnt first as unanalysed lexical chunks (Peters, 1983).

depending on whether or not the name of the cited author occurs in the citing sentence or in parenthesis.

If you want to refer to a particular part of the source:

According to Peters (1983, p. 56) evidence from first language acquisition indicates that lexical phrases are learnt first as unanalysed lexical chunks.

(At end of essay)

References

Peters, A (1983). *The units of language acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



b) Direct Quotation

Occasionally you may want to quote another author's words exactly. For example:

Hillocks (1982) similarly reviews dozens of research findings. He writes, "The available research suggests that teaching by written comment on compositions is generally ineffective" (p. 267).

(At end of essay)

References

Hillocks, G. (1982). The interaction of instruction, teacher comment, and revision in teaching the composing process. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 16, 261-278.

If you do so, keep the quotation as brief as possible and quote only when it is necessary. You must always have a good reason for using a quote - and feeling unable to paraphrase or summarise is never a good reason. The idea of an essay is for you to say something for yourself using the ideas of the subject; you present ideas you have learned in your own way. The emphasis should be on working with other people's ideas, not reproducing their words. Your paper should be a synthesis of information from sources, expressed in your own words, not a collection of quotations. Any quote you use should not do your job for you, but should add something to the point you are making. The quote should support your point, by quoting evidence or giving examples or illustrating, or add the weight of an authority. It should not repeat information or disagree with your point.

Reasons for using quotations:

1. quote if you use another person's words: you must not use another person's words as your own;
2. you need to support your points, quoting is one way to do this;
3. quote if the language used in the quotation says what you want to say particularly well.

Reasons for not using quotations:

1. do not quote if the information is well-known in your subject area;
2. do not use a quotation that disagrees with your argument unless you can prove it is wrong;
3. do not quote if you cannot understand the meaning of the original source;
4. do not quote if you are not able to paraphrase the original;

5. do not use quotations to **make** your points for you; use them to **support** your points.

If you decide to use a quotation, you must be very careful to make it clear that the words or ideas that you are using are taken from another writer.

This can be done in several ways, either integral or non-integral:

Widdowson (1979, p. 5) states that "there is a good deal of argument in favour of extending the concept of competence to cover the ability to use language to communicative effect."

According to Widdowson (1979), "there is a good deal of argument in favour of extending the concept of competence to cover the ability to use language to communicative effect" (p. 5).

According to Widdowson, "there is a good deal of argument in favour of extending the concept of competence to cover the ability to use language to communicative effect" (1979, p. 5).

According to one researcher, "there is a good deal of argument in favour of extending the concept of competence to cover the ability to use language to communicative effect" (Widdowson, 1979, p. 5).

(In all cases at end of essay)

References

Widdowson, H. G. (1979). *Explorations in applied linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

When you are using a direct quotation of a single phrase or sentence, quotation marks should be used around the words, which must be quoted **exactly** as they are in the original. However, note the following:

1. You may wish to omit some of the author's original words that are not relevant to your writing. In this case, use three dots (...) to indicate where you have omitted words. If you omit any of the author's original words, make sure you do not change the meaning.

He stated, "The 'placebo effect,' ... disappeared when behaviours were studied in this manner" (Smith, 1982, p. 276), but he did not clarify which behaviours were studied.

2. If you need to insert material (additions or explanations) into a quotation, use brackets, ([...]).

Smith (1982) found that "the placebo effect, which had been verified in previous studies, disappeared when [his own and others'] behaviours were studied in this manner" (p. 276).

3. If the material quoted already contains a quotation, use single quotation marks for the original quotation ('...').

He stated, "The 'placebo effect,' ... disappeared when behaviours were studied in this manner" (Smith, 1982, p. 276), but he did not clarify which behaviours were studied.

4. If the direct quotation is long - more than two or three lines, it should be indented as a separate paragraph with no quotation marks.

According to Smith (1982, p. 276): The "placebo effect," which had been verified in previous studies, disappeared when behaviours were studied in this manner. Furthermore, the behaviours were never exhibited again, even when real drugs were administered. Earlier studies were clearly premature in attributing the results to the placebo effect.

(In all cases at end of essay)

References

Smith. G. (1982). The placebo effect. *Psychology Today*, 18, 273-278.



Secondary sources

In all cases, if you have not actually read the work you are referring to, you should give the reference for the secondary source - what you have read. In the text, you should then use the following method:

According to Jones (as cited in Smith, 1982, p. 276), the

(At end of essay)

References

Smith. G. (1982). The placebo effect. *Psychology Today*, 18, 273-278.

Language

Reporting - Paraphrasing and Summarising

Reporting uses paraphrase and summary to acknowledge another author's ideas. You can extract and summarise important points, while at the same time making it clear from whom and where you have got the ideas you are discussing and what your point of view is. Compare, for example:

Brown (1983, p. 231) claims that a far more effective approach is ...

Brown (1983, p. 231) points out that a far more effective approach is ...

A far more effective approach is ... (Brown, 1983, p. 231)

The first one is Brown's opinion with no indication about your opinion. The second one is Brown's opinion, which you agree with, and the third is your opinion, which is supported by Brown

Here are some more expressions you can use to refer to someone's work that you are going to paraphrase:

If you agree with what the writer says.

The work of X indicates that ...

The work of X reveals that ...

The work of X shows that ...

Turning to X, one finds that ...

Reference to X reveals that ...

In a study of Y, X found that ...

As X points out, ...

As X has indicated ...

A study by X shows that ...

X has drawn attention to the fact that ...

X argues that ...

X points out that ...

X makes clear that ...

If you disagree with what the writer says.

X claims that ...

The work of X asserts that ...

X feels that ...

If you do not want to give your opinion about what the writer says.

According to X...

It is the view of X that ...

The opinion of X is that ...

In an article by X, ...

Research by X suggests that ...

X has expressed a similar view.

X reports that ...

X notes that ...

X states that ...

X observes that ...

X concludes that ...

X argues that ...

X found that ...

X discovered that ...

Quoting

Sometimes you may want to quote an author's words exactly, not paraphrase them. If you decide to quote directly from a text, you will need an expression to introduce it and quotation marks will need to be used:

As X said/says, "... ..."

As X stated/states, "... ..."

As X wrote/writes, "... ..."

As X commented/comments, "... ..."

As X observed/observes, "... ..."

As X pointed/points out, "... ..."

To quote from X, "... ..."

It was X who said that "... ..."

This example is given by X: "... ..."

According to X, "... .."

X claims that, "... .."

X found that, "... .."

The opinion of X is that, "... .."

Concluding

After quoting evidence you reach a conclusion:

The evidence seems to indicate that...

It must therefore be recognised that...

The indications are therefore that...

It is clear therefore that ...

Thus it could be concluded that...

The evidence seems to be strong that...

On this basis it may be inferred that...

Given this evidence, it can be seen that...

Features of academic writing

Introduction

Try this exercise.

Academic writing in English is linear, which means it has one central point or theme with every part contributing to the main line of argument, without digressions or repetitions. Its objective is to inform rather than entertain. As well as this it is in the standard written form of the language. There are six main features of academic writing that are often discussed. Academic writing is to some extent: complex, formal, objective, explicit, hedged, and responsible.

Complexity

Written language is relatively more complex than spoken language. Written language has longer words, it is lexically more dense and it has a more varied vocabulary. It uses more noun-based phrases than verb-based phrases. Written texts are shorter and the language has more grammatical complexity, including more subordinate clauses and more passives.

Complexity

Formality

Academic writing is relatively formal. In general this means that in an essay you should avoid colloquial words and expressions.

Formality

Objectivity

Written language is in general objective rather than personal. It therefore has fewer words that refer to the writer or the reader. This means that the main emphasis should be on the information that you want to give and the arguments you want to make, rather than you.

Objectivity

Explicitness

Academic writing is explicit about the relationships in the text. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of the writer in English to make it clear to the reader how the various parts of the text are related. These connections can be made explicit by the use of different signalling words.

Explicitness

Hedging

In any kind of academic writing you do, it is necessary to make decisions about your stance on a particular subject, or the strength of the claims you are making. Different subjects prefer to do this in different ways.

A technique common in certain kinds of academic writing is known by linguists as a 'hedge'.

Hedging

Responsibility

In academic writing you must be responsible for, and must be able to provide evidence and justification for, any claims you make. You are also responsible for demonstrating an understanding of any source texts you use.

Responsibility

Check list

Here are some useful questions to ask yourself about your essay:

1. Does the essay deal with the topic that was set?
2. Does the essay answer the question that was set?
3. Does it cover all the main aspects and in sufficient depth?
4. Is the content accurate and relevant?
5. Is everything in the essay relevant to the question?
6. Is the material logically arranged?
7. Is each main point well supported by examples and argument?
8. Is there a clear distinction between your ideas and those of other authors?
9. Have you acknowledged all the sources you have used?
10. Is the length of the essay right for its purpose?
11. Is it written plainly and simply, without clumsy or obscure phrasing?
12. Is the grammar, punctuation and spelling acceptable?
13. Is it neat and legibly written?