

WRITING AN ACADEMIC ESSAY

1. Choosing the topic and planning the organisation of the thesis

- Define the **field** you are interested in – methodology, literature or linguistics
- Recognise a **problem** that you are capable of dealing with
- Select **material** to serve as the basis for your research (corpus)
- Set out broad **objectives** that your thesis should achieve (**hypothesis**)
- Come to an **understanding** of the problem (reading reference books)
- Determine what **options** are possible (combining ideas suggested by the reading with own conclusions based on the material under investigation)
- Evaluate those options against objectives (**testing your hypothesis**)
- Assess the **results** of your research (confirmation or denial of the hypothesis)
- Monitor and observe the results (*self-assessment* – methodology + research achievements; stating goals for further research)

2. The structure and content of the thesis

- Introduction – State what you intend to write about, explain why you consider it to be a topic worth writing about, suggest what methodology/approach you are to use, present the structure of your thesis – *Firstly, the thesis will deal with ..., secondly ..., thirdly ...*
- Main body of the text – **Do NOT just describe problems and ideas, discuss and assess them critically.**

There are two approaches available to the organisation of an academic thesis:

A. The theoretical → practical part structure

The **theoretical part** discusses the reference literature and is divided into several sub-chapters according to the theoretical issues discussed. The final part of the theoretical part is the **conclusion** where the standpoint of the author of the thesis is stated clearly, so as to be used as a theoretical basis for the analysis of the materials in the practical part. The **practical part** presents the work with the language material and the solution to the problems stated in the introduction. The results are summarised in the **conclusion** pointing to the evaluation of the objectives stated in the **introduction (hypothesis)** and bridging back to the theoretical part.

B. The objectives → options → arguments structure

The thesis is divided into **chapters** according to the **issues (objectives)** to be discussed in the text. Each chapter presents some theoretical preliminaries gathered from the reading, which serve as a basis for the discussion of the options available for the solution to the problem (demonstrated on the language material) and the logical sequence of arguments

supporting the best alternative proposed by the author. Thus the issues discussed study the problem under investigation from several viewpoints linking theoretical considerations to their practical implementation on the language material. Each chapter is closed by a **conclusion** reviewing the main points which make the argument progress coherently towards the achievement of the objectives stated in the hypothesis, evaluates the options suggested and announces the issue to be analysed in the following chapter.

- Conclusion

Summarise what you have written about, explain why it was worth writing about, discuss how appropriate the methodology or approach was that you have opted for. State clearly whether your expectations stated in the hypothesis were confirmed or denied. Highlight what is the contribution of your research in the context of the field of study/issue you have written about. Mention possible related problems which you would consider worth examining.

3. Guidelines concerning your writing style

- The choice of point of view – impersonal, personal (*We* or *I*) or a possible interplay of the three (that interplay should be conscious and should achieve some emphatic effect, not just a chaotic change of viewpoint). Notice that when using scientific prose style, you are not supposed to be emotive; you are supposed to provide logical argumentation and not to appeal to the emotions of the readers to prove your point of view.
- The length of the thesis – the approximate length required is 60 pp. Therefore writing less than 58pp is more than inadvisable, less than 50pp unacceptable. Writing more than 75-80 pp, though, is not a sign of good quality, it is a sign that the author is unable to express his/her ideas in a concise way.
- Using ideas from the reading – Do NOT just repeat or state ideas and material from books and magazines – discuss and apply the ideas; do NOT just state personal opinions – use a well constructed argument to prove your opinion. When you refer to ideas from books and magazines without quoting directly, you have still to refer to the author, publication, chapter and/or pages where the idea is discussed.
- Using numbering and lettering – the logical structure of your essay should be explicit, using linkers and other devices for highlighting a coherent development of the arguments.
- Quoting – there are two basic ways for quoting from a text.
If the quote is coherently integrated in your text (it is a part of your sentence), then you integrate it into the text using quotations and refer to the reference in brackets after the unquote. If you quote a longer passage which is illustrative and does not form an integral part of your text, then you present it as a separate indented paragraph using smaller size letters and again you point to the reference in brackets after at the end of the quotation.

A sample model for referencing: (Cook 1981a: 130)

A sample model when mentioning the author in the reporting clause: *G. Yule relates the concept of distance to the notion of spatial deixis “where the relative location of people and things is being indicated.” (Yule 1996:12).*

- A list of useful verbs when referring to ideas you have read about

add, address a problem, accept, achieve, analyse, announce, argue, apply a concept, assess, attempt, be interested in, capture, centre on, cite, claim, clarify, confirm, consider, construct, comment, conclude, conceptualise, deal with, define, deny, develop a view, devote attention to, describe, discuss, draw the attention to, elaborate a theory, emphasise, explain, explore, examine, evaluate, favour, find, differentiate, focus, foreground, forecast, go on to point/summarise, highlight, include, investigate, introduce a concept, implement, label, make an issue of, mention, maintain, note, notice, offer, point out, present, predict, promise, proves, put forward a hypothesis, provide a methodology/answer/argument, prove, quote, question, refer to, renew, research, run into problems, show, study, state, suggest, stress, summarise, support, tackle, treat, underscore, underline, warn, write

- A full bibliography of references and sources used

A sample entry for the bibliography/sources list:

Cook G. (1981): *Discourse*, OUP.

If you quote an article from a collection of articles:

Montgomery G. (1995): Reading comprehension. In **Burton R.** (ed.) (1995): *Reading Skills*, CUP.

- Terminology

If the terminology used in the field you intend to write about tends to be idiosyncratic to the authors you may consider including a glossary of terms as an appendix to your work. If the terminology is particularly controversial you may decide to discuss it, stating whose terminology you agree with and why.