ACADEMIC SKILLS

Week 12

Project Presentation Seminar 1: Writing

Dr. Richard Nowell

Agenda

Structure

Our views of academic writing as readers

Becoming a reader-oriented writer

Targeted Learning Outcome

Precise, economic, elegant writing.

What is the purpose(s) of academic writing?

What are your views on the writing style of the scholarship you have read?

How would you describe your academic writing?

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What do you think about this piece of writing?

Do you know what the author is trying to say?

If you don't, whose fault is it?

Diane Negra, "Romance and/as Toursim"

In this chapter I devote attention to one of the ways in which romance in recent American cinema is implicated with the fantasy transcendence of US borders. Attending to the emergence of a set of films that centralize a narrative of Europeanization, I argue that these texts constitute an important new permutation of the woman's film in the 1990s. Films such as *Only You* (1994), *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994), *French Kiss* (1995), *The Matchmaker* (1997), and *Notting Hill* (1999) are bound together by a codified set of narrative protocols which include, for instance, the reluctant or accidental arrival of the protagonist in a nation in Western Europe, the discovery within that national setting of new possibilities for coupling and family formation, and the narrow averting of a return to the US by the heroine, who is instead inscribed within a "happy ending" achievable because of her symbolic acquisition of a foreign nationality.

How About this Version?

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This chapter argues that 1990s Hollywood romcoms portraying American heroines moving to Europe represent a new type of feamle oriented film.

Or, How About this one?

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This chapter argues how some 1990s Hollywood romcoms constitute a new kind of women's film in which the heroine arrives in Europe, falls in love, and starts a family. These films suggest staying in Europe represents a happy ending for her.

The Pragmatics of Style

Success in academic writing can partly be down to the style in which a piece is written; it can be the difference between top and lower grades

Style is not simply a matter of taste here, although folks will invariably be more or less accepting/forgiving of certain writing tendencies

However, what we must first acknowledge is that academic writing takes as its subject matter quite – sometimes very – challenging ideas

Under these circumstances, it is surely the responsibility of the writer to do all they can to help the reader understand this complex material

Given we ask so much of readers, there are three qualities to which we should aspire if we are to become the best academic writers we can be

The Cornerstones of Academic Style

1. **Precision**: or avoiding ambiguities or hesitations in our writing

2. **Economy**: or saying things in as few words as possible

3. **Elegance**: or facilitating a relatively "smooth" reading experience

These qualities are both mutually complementary and dovetailing to a greater extent; together they put the burden on us and not the reader

In each case they serve to reinforce the power of our authorial voice: they help us to convince the reader we are authorities on our topics

In all cases, these qualities are concerned with putting the reader first

Precision: Between Specificity and Ambiguity

It is important to try to write precisely, after all we are trying to persuade our readers to adopt our perspective on a quite complex topic

Being precise, requires we know exactly what we want to say; it is the hard-earned outcome of having thought very carefully about our points

Tip 1: Read Mindfully – ask yourselves why certain academic writing is precise about its topics, whereas others fall short in this respect

Tip 2: Know Your Topics – think about the main agents, actions, and phenomena you are writing about

Tip 2: Build Glossaries – make a database of the terms and concepts you most frequently use and talk about in your academic writing

Economy: Between Density and Verbosity

This involves saving readers' time, requiring them not to mentally edit our repetition, redundancy, and empty rhetoric as they read our work

On the other hand, we might also want to avoid using so few words that the reader is overwhelmed with information, and misses key points

Tip 1: try to avoid using multiple words when one suffices: saying something is "enormous" instead of "very large"

Tip 2: try to avoid passive constructions which require more words: "the ball hit him" rather than "he was hit by the ball"

Tip 3: try to avoid reiterating a point albeit using different words in the same paragraph – an easy mistake we all make for anyone!!

Elegance:
Between Lullabies and Machine Guns

On the one hand then, we may wish to avoid producing writing that is so elegant it undermines the mindfulness needed to identify key points

By contrast, we may wish to avoid writing that leads readers to hesitate, stop, and restart continuously, thereby making key points harder to find

Tip 1: Try to avoid repeating words within or across consecutive sentences; use your glossaries to built synonyms

Tip 2: Try to avoid using the same phrases more than once across the whole manuscript, unless you are doing so for emphasis

Tip 3: Try to avoid clusters of very short words or clusters of multisyllabic terms (not just Latinisms, but long words generally)

Take-Aways

Producing good academic writing can be a challenge for native and non-native speakers alike, not least because it articulates complex ideas

One would be hard pressed to find a student who was not frustrated by bad academic writing, even if they are guilty of writing it themselves

But we might produce better academic writing if we appreciate how difficult it is for people to read academic works in the first place

The adoption of a reader-oriented perspective might lead us to develop three approaches to our writing: precision, economy, and elegance

These may help us produce reader-friendly prose that is *extremely* accurate, *relatively* concise, and *fairly* smooth to read through

Next Time

Date: 15.12.22

Instructor: Sarka

Topic: Project Presentation Seminar II: Referencing

Outcome: How and why we reference our work.

Preparation: How would you reference your primary and secondary resources? Prepare two examples of each with the assistance of provided faculty referencing style.