

POSTGRADUATE RESOURCES

ACADEMIC WRITING



Table of Contents

Introduction

Writing Structure

Macro level—Structure

Middle level—Paragraphs

- unity
- development
- cohesion

Micro level—Sentences

- academic style
- sentence structures
- using sources (in text referencing)

Tips—How to develop as a writer

POSTGRADUATE RESOURCES

ACADEMIC WRITING

Introduction

Postgraduate writing should demonstrate:

- a clear understanding of subject matter
- an ability to analyse and evaluate information for relevance, accuracy and authority
- a logical, flowing structure

Be aware that:

- **writing and THINKING are integrally connected.** You can't write well if you don't have enough ideas and information about what you want to say.
- **much of the writing process is RE-WRITING.** You will need to draft and revise your work several times until you achieve an appropriate structure and level of clarity.

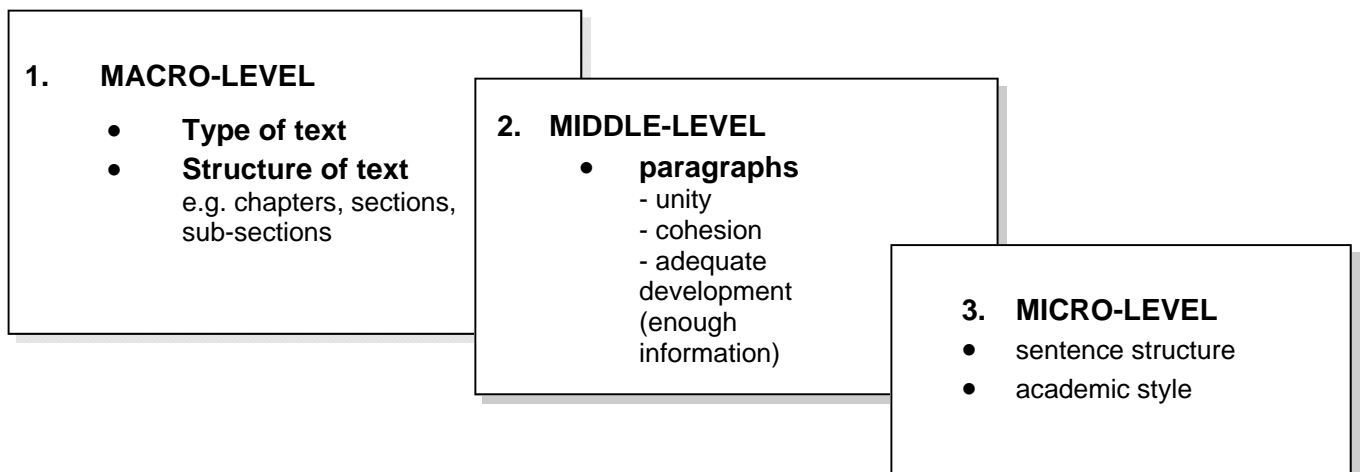
To develop your writing you need to:

- **Become familiar with the discourses of your discipline**
Different areas of study have different discourses (types of writing structures and language use). For example, engineers write very differently from social scientists. You need to:
 - look for and pay attention to the types of writing in your field
 - build your vocabulary and use of the specific terminology of your discipline.
- **Be responsible to your reader (audience)**
You are not writing only for your lecturer. Your audience is an educated reader who does not know your specific topic area. You need to guide them clearly and directly through the points that you are making. This is done through:
 - having a clear structure
 - making explicit links between the ideas you present

Writing Structure

You may be required to write in several genres: thesis, essay, report, case study or a combination of these. All academic writing tasks have something in common – three levels of structure.

1. macro structure (type of text, and its major subdivisions)
2. middle level paragraph development
3. micro-level sentence structure and style choices



In some macro-structures (such as a scientific thesis) the main sections are fairly set; in others (such as many styles of report) some sections are set but much of the organisation is open. You create your own structure with **headings and subheadings**. In a traditional essay you map out connected sets of paragraphs. Link to [essay writing](#) and [writing reports](#)

Look at the three sample structures in the table – remember these are only possibilities.

Thesis – scientific structure	Report (or thesis) structure	Essay (traditional) structure
Abstract Acknowledgements List of figures Glossary 1.0 Introduction 1.1 Aim 1.2 Participants 1.3 Research questions 2.0 Literature review 2.1 2.2 etc 3.0 Methodology 4.0 Results 5.0 Discussion 6.0 Conclusion 7.0 Recommendations 8.0 References	Summary List of Figures List of Abbreviations 1.0 INTRODUCTION 1.1 THE EXISTING SITE 1.2 PROJECT OUTLINE 2.0 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES 2.1 ENERGY CONSERVATION 2.1.1 Passive solar design 2.1.2 Insulation 2.1.3 Vegetation 2.1.4 Solar power 2.2 WATER CONSERVATION 2.2.1 Rainwater collection 2.2.2 Irrigation systems 3.0 DEMOLITION AND CONSTRUCTION 3.1 RECYCLING MATERIALS etc. 4.0 CONCLUSION 5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS 6.0 REFERENCES 6.0 APPENDICES	Introduction Brief location of topic Areas to be covered Thesis statement: English will not become the dominant world language Body Point by point development of argument – widespread use of English in official organisations/ science/technology – rapid spread of English in cultural domain BUT – English speakers vastly outnumbered by speakers of other languages – Backlash against American culture – Possible new technology to arise out of NES country Conclusion Summary of arguments Return to thesis

Organisation within the broad structure

You will need to **brainstorm** and map out the topics, arguments and examples you need to cover within the broader structure. This is a messy, creative phase as you move between your topic area, your readings and your early plan. But it is a crucial **THINKING** phase. Once you have an idea of structure the writing can "fall into place".

Some common patterns of organisation include:

- chronological – development by time order
- This can be useful for describing scientific processes or the development of a concept.
- logical division of ideas – e.g. big picture to detail, supporting and opposing arguments
- order of importance

Example

Here are two possible plans for the body of an essay on the following topic.

Topic: <i>Globalisation</i> is a threat to the sovereignty of states. Discuss, using one or two countries as examples. (Assume you have already defined the term <i>globalisation</i> in the introduction).	
Structural Plan 1	Structural Plan 2
Country A i. globalisation threat 1 ii. globalisation threat 2 iii. globalisation threat 3 Country B i. globalisation threat 1 ii. globalisation threat 2 iii. globalisation threat 3 iv. globalisation threat 4 c) similarities between countries A & B d) differences between countries A & B e) under what conditions is globalisation a threat to the sovereignty of nations	a) How globalisation threatens countries: i. Threat 1: what is it? - example using country A &/or B ii. Threat #2: what is it? example using country A &/or B iii. Threat #3: what is it? example using country A &/or B b) Is globalisation a threat to the sovereignty of states overall? What significant differences can be found between countries A & B? Can we give reasons for these differences?

Middle Level Structure – paragraphs

Within the sections and sub-sections of your writing task, paragraphs form the next layer of structure.

A paragraph has three important features:

- **unity**
- **development**
- **cohesion**

Unity

A paragraph should contain one main idea or claim, expressed in a topic sentence, often the first sentence. The paragraph should have a logical structure so that all the sentences are connected and flow from the central theme. There are many types of paragraph structure. This is problem-solution.

Topic sentence (expressing the “problem”) → **The emphasis of the criminal justice system has until recently been on the battle between the offender/defendant and the state/prosecutor and not the actual harm experienced by the victim.** *In Fact victims have had minimal participation in the criminal justice process; their role being primarily to provide information to the state prosecutor with no involvement in prosecution and sentencing.* McShane and Williams (1992, p. 260) contend that "victim neglect is not simply a result of indifference, it is a logical extension of a legal system which defines crime as an offence against the state". They argue that this neglect can be remedied by training of personnel within the criminal justice system and through victim support services.

Expansion of point → *being primarily to provide information to the state prosecutor with no involvement in prosecution and sentencing.*

Evidence/ support → not simply a result of indifference, it is a logical extension of a legal system which defines crime as an offence against the state". They argue that this neglect can be remedied by training of personnel within the criminal justice system and through victim support services.

Solution → They argue that this neglect can be remedied by training of personnel within the criminal justice system and through victim support services.

Development

A paragraph has to have enough information in it to justify being a paragraph! It should consist of a main point that is then further elaborated on. Some possible development models include:

- expansion – the point is further defined or broken down and analysed or reframed for clarification.
- illustration – examples or scenarios are given
- evidence – research-based or sometimes experience-based support for the point
- application – how this can then operate in practice

There may also be a sentence which comments on the material or relates the expanded point back to main topic of that section of the writing.

Learner anxiety in the classroom

<p>Topic sentence-main idea</p> <p><i>Expansion of point(italic)</i></p> <p><u>Comment</u></p>	<p>The research on anxiety suggests that like self-esteem, anxiety can be experienced at various levels (Oxford 1999). <i>At the deepest or global level, trait anxiety is a more permanent predisposition to be anxious. Some people are predictably and generally anxious about many things. At a more momentary, or situational level, state anxiety is experienced in relation to some particular event or act. <u>As we learned in the case of self-esteem, then, it is important in a classroom for a teacher to try to determine whether a student’s anxiety stems from a more global trait or whether it comes from a particular situation at the moment.</u></i></p>
---	--

Source: Brown, H.D (2000) *Principles of teaching and learning*. 4th Ed. NY:Addison Wesley Longman

Workshop Activity 2—different paragraph structures

Cohesion within paragraphs

Text cohesion is the way the writing holds together, to make sense. Each sentence should relate to the other sentences in the paragraph. A number of cohesive devices assist in creating text cohesion.

- key words (**or synonyms**) repeated
- pronouns (**it, she, they**) referring to a person or thing already mentioned
- reference words (**that, this**) which link related ideas, e.g. one such experiment; in this way; these
- general class words – (**these characteristics, this process**)
- conjunctions and sentence connectors (**but, however, furthermore, yet**)
- sign-posts to emphasise the relationships expressed (**on the other hand; in contrast; in addition; moreover; first, second..**)
- parallel structures (using a repeated grammatical form)

In the following paragraph the sentences are all about mummification but they jump all over the place. There is no overall paragraph plan and they jump all over the place.

The ancient Egyptians were masters of preserving dead people’s bodies by making mummies of them. Mummies several thousand years old have been discovered nearly intact. The skin, hair, teeth, finger- and toenails, and facial features of the mummies were evident. It is possible to diagnose the diseases they suffered in life such as smallpox, arthritis, and nutritional deficiencies. The process was remarkably effective. Sometimes apparent were the fatal afflictions of the dead people: a middle-aged king died from a blow on the head, and polio killed a child king. Mummification consisted of removing the internal organs, applying natural preservatives inside and out, and then wrapping the body in layers of bandages.

Here is the same paragraph revised with a plan (from general to specific)and clearer links to help the reader

<p>The ancient Egyptians were masters of preserving dead people’s bodies by making mummies of them. <i>The process of mummification</i> consisted of removing the internal organs, applying natural preservatives inside and out, and then wrapping the body in layers of bandages. <i>It was a remarkably effective practice.</i> <u>Indeed,</u> <i>mummies</i> several thousand years old have been discovered nearly intact. <i>Their</i> skin, hair, teeth, fingers and toenails, and facial features of the mummies <u>are still</u> evident. <i>Their</i> diseases in life, such as smallpox, arthritis, and nutritional deficiencies, <u>are still</u> diagnosable. <u>Even</u> <i>their</i> fatal afflictions <u>are still</u> apparent: a middle-aged king died from a blow on the head: a child king died from polio.</p>	<p>Topic sentence is bold</p> <p><i>Words in italics</i> – nouns repeated and then pronouns</p> <p><u>Boxed words</u>: links between sentences</p> <p><u>Underlined words</u>: Parallel grammatical form for parallel content</p>
--	--

Adapted from: Fowler, Aaron & Anderson (2001) *The little brown handbook*, New York: Addison Wesley (pp. 81-2)

Cohesion across paragraphs

There should also be cohesive links between the paragraphs. These alert the reader to the relationships between the points you present. The following series of paragraphs uses a basic list structure (a writing equivalent of 1, 2, 3...) This structure is very useful for grouping sections of text that develop a set of points. These paragraphs may then be set off against other sections of text (as in comparison).

<p>Billing bytes received does have some flaws. <i>First</i>, many network protocols send acknowledgments from the destination to the source, resulting in users who offer services to the network receiving bytes of data from the network that they did not request. Fortunately, acknowledgment packets are usually quite small. <i>These bytes</i> could be ignored, however, by network devices that can compute the total number of acknowledgments seen. <i>Also</i>, the organization that computes the bills can recognize the users who offer services to the network and possibly offer them a discount on their bills.</p> <p>Another problem with billing based on bytes received is that unsolicited network data, such as electronic mail, adds to the user's bill. This flaw can perhaps be overlooked because many users send and receive mail on the same order of magnitude. This might not be the case, however, when a user is on the mailing list and receives many mail messages. <i>In this situation</i>, the user is on the mailing list for a reason and their bill should reflect the receipt of this data as a result of this network service.</p> <p>Still another possible imperfection in this billing method arises from each user receiving data from the network as the organization monitors it for management reasons, as illustrated in Fig. 6.5. ...</p> <p><i>However, ...</i></p>	<p>Topic sentences in bold</p> <p><u>Problem 1 (flaws)</u> <i>Text markers and reference words are in italics. These words orient the reader through the text, clarifying the topic focus at each stage</i></p> <p><u>Problem 2 (problem)</u></p> <p>The <u>subject</u> repeated in a full but slightly altered form is in a box</p> <p><u>Problem 3 (imperfection)</u></p> <p>The <u>subject</u> repeated but with a general word 'method' is in a box</p>
---	--

Source: Leinwand, A., & Fang, K. (1996). *Network Management: a practical perspective*, Reading, Mass.: Addison Wesley (p. 102)

Workshop Activity 3—Rewriting for greater cohesion

3. Micro-level – sources, sentences and academic style

Every sentence in your writing should be included for a specific reason and should connect with the sentences around it and the overall topic. Each sentence should make logical and grammatical sense and be expressed in an appropriately academic style. Some aspects of academic style you need to be aware of include:

Degrees of certainty

There is rarely absolute proof of an event or a direct causal relationship between phenomena. There are more often correlations and links. This means that tentative language (such as *tends to*, *indicates that*, *suggests that*, *the majority of*) is often appropriate. For example:

This *tends to occur* whenever there is a downturn in commodity prices.

However when you know something always happens and you can be confident it will happen the same way in the future you should not be tentative.

This *occurs* whenever there is a downturn in commodity prices.

Third person voice (unless the personal aspect is an important part of the work)

The third person voice (*it*, *they*, *he*, *she*, *the authors*, *researchers*) distances the self from the work and appears more

objective than the first person *I, we* or second person *you*.

Third person.

Vocabulary choice evidently plays a role in determining which topics are taken up by speakers.

First person

I found that the vocabulary choice played a role in determining which topics speakers take up.

However, in some types of writing (such as reflective journal writing and creative arts exegeses) the first person is used to reflect the personal, subjective, process-based, exploratory nature of the study or project. You may need to negotiate this aspect with your lecturers.

Contractions (shortened forms)

Use the full forms of words, e.g. *do not* instead of *don't*; *cannot* instead of *can't*; *it is* instead of *it's*. For example:

Unemployment figures *will not* improve until the economy is stronger.

Contractions are acceptable if you are quoting from transcripts, personal journals or diaries or as part of a highly personal thesis style.

Nominalisation (noun forms)

Academic writing usually has more noun structures than verb structures. These noun forms are useful in condensing text and when the focus is on conditions or results rather than actions. However, too much nominalisation can make the writing very dense and difficult to read.

For example:

Heavily nominalised (noun forms underlined)

The company's original conclusion that the establishment of increased flexibility in attendance hours has resulted in a decrease in absenteeism, was endorsed in the most recent analysis.

Rewritten for greater clarity (verb forms underlined)

In a recent analysis the company confirmed its earlier conclusion that greater flexibility in attendance hours for workers reduces absentee rates.

Passive and active voice

The passive voice emphasises the action over the person doing the action (the actor). It is a very useful technique when the actor is not important to the event. For example.

Active

My classmates and I measured the refractive index of the liquid.

Passive

The refractive index of the liquid was measured.

However, the passive voice (particularly in conjunction with nominalization) can contribute to writing sounding very formal and losing clarity.

Passive

Agreement as to the need for revisions in the terms of the treaty was reached by the two sides.

Active (and part passive)

The two sides agreed that the terms of the treaty should be revised.

Direct questions

In general your writing should restrict direct questions to:

- your specific research questions (thesis, exegesis, a research paper, project, report, reflective journal)
- an emphasis of the relationship between aspects of your writing

Example: Natural resource management

So how can the desire for environmental protection and the equally, if not more, potent desire for economic development be resolved? This is where theorists tend to contradict one another..... Smith (2003) recommends that.....while Jones (2004) believes that withoutany resolution is unlikely.

This question is called a *rhetorical* question. It is used to engage the reader in a kind of 'conversation'. It is a question that has strong reflexive powers, since it is the person who asks the question who then attempts to answer.

Formal forms of quantity with positive verbs

- No** The analysis yielded no new results (more formal)
 The analysis did not yield any new results
- Little** The recent budget allocated little funding to the program (more formal)
 The recent budget did not allocate much funding to the program
- Few** There seem to be few viable solutions to this problem (more formal)
 There do not seem to be many viable solutions to this problem
 Note: few means 'hardly any ' ; a few means 'three or four'
- Much** Much research has been conducted into global warming
Many (these are more formal than "a lot of")

Conciseness

Try to use the most straightforward term and reduce unnecessary words. Here are some common "wordy" phrases that can be reduced into more concise forms.

Wordy (or redundant)	Concise
in recent years	recently
with a high degree of certainty	certain
at this moment in time	currently, now (not nowadays)
in close proximity (to)	close (to)
advance planning	planning (all planning is in advance)
co-operate together	co-operate (means together)
few in number	few
crisis situation	crisis (this is a situation)
a great deal of	much/many
in order to	to
make adjustments	adjust
is reflective of	reflects
is capable of	can

In text referencing (using sources)

You will need to support the points you make with evidence and examples from other research. It is important to do this thoughtfully and carefully so you do not plagiarise.

Look at the student paraphrased versions of Harden's idea, with evaluative comments.

Original material:

'...nurses can be viewed as an oppressed group, a view supported by the fact that nurses lack autonomy, accountability and control over their own profession. Yet nursing is by far the largest occupational group within the sphere of healthcare, so why is it so powerless? For me the history of the domination of nursing is inextricably linked to that of the domination and oppression of women.'

Harden, J 1996, *Enlightenment, empowerment and emancipation: the case for critical pedagogy in nurse education*

Student version 1:

Nursing is by far the largest occupation group in healthcare. Yet, nurses can be seen as an oppressed group. This view is supported by the fact that nurses lack control over their own profession. They do not have autonomy or accountability. The history of the domination and oppression of women is the link to explaining the domination of nursing.

The student has copied most of the original. There is no indication of where the student's voice ends and the cited writer's voice begins. There is no author or date (no reference). Therefore the text is plagiarised.

Student version 2:

Although nurses form the largest occupational group in the healthcare profession, they can be seen as an oppressed group. Harden (1996) states that the domination of nurses is inextricably linked to the historical oppression and domination of women in society. For nurses, she claims this oppression is illustrated by the extremely limited professional independence they have as seen by their lack of accountability and control over their profession.

It is still not clear which ideas come from the reference and which from the student. Although the source has been acknowledged, many sections have been taken directly from the original, and should have been acknowledged as quotes. Moving a few words around or using a few synonyms does not make it your writing or your ideas. Therefore, this is also a plagiarized version.

Student version 3:

Despite nurses forming the largest group in the healthcare professions, Harden (1996) claims they can be categorised 'as an oppressed group' (p.33). She explains the domination of nurses as a reflection of the historical oppression and domination of women in society. For Harden (1996), this subservient role of nurses is illustrated by their '*lack of autonomy, accountability and control over their own profession*' (p.33).

Here the student has made much better use of the original. Some words have been paraphrased. Words taken directly from the original are clearly marked as quotes (note that they are only in italics in this example to show what has been quoted). Also, the source is clearly documented.

How to develop as a writer

Read for structure and clarity.

Improving your reading strategies and your judgement of writing quality will have an impact on your writing skills.

Note how other writers:

- present their main position
- define key terms
- structure headings and sub-headings
- organise paragraphs
- use visual support materials (charts, tables, illustrations)
- link ideas (cohesive devices)
- cite other sources as evidence or support for discussion and analysis

Get started and write regularly

- Don't put off writing – you need to leave plenty of time for thinking and revision.
- Try to write something every day: notes, personal reflections, mind-maps.
- Let your ideas flow freely at the start and then impose a structure upon them

Write with awareness

- Be clear: writing is a link between your own understanding and your ability to make others understand what you mean.
- Use a simple, structured approach if you are not confident to test out new ground within the discipline.
- If and when you break with tradition, make sure that you can justify this decision.

References

Brown, H.D 2000, *Principles of teaching and learning*, 4th Ed. Addison Wesley Longman, New York

Dyson, F. 1979, *Disturbing the Universe*, Harper & Row, New York.

Fowler, H.R and Aaron, J.E. 2001, *The little brown handbook*, Longman, New York

Gee, J. P 1992, *The social mind: language, ideology and social practice*, Bergin and Garvey, New York

Harden, J. 1996, 'Enlightenment, empowerment and emancipation: the case for critical pedagogy in nurse education',
in
Nurse Educator Today, Vol.16, pp. 32-37

Leinwand, A. and Fang, K 1993, *Network management: a practical perspective*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, MASS, p.102

O'Leary, M. and Meas. N. 2001, *Learning for transformation: a study of the relationship between culture, values, experience and development practice in Cambodia* Krom Akphiwat Phum, Battambang, Cambodia