



Co-funded by the  
Tempus Programme  
of the European Union

# Academic & Business Writing

**Professor Tina Harrison**

Assistant Principal

Academic Standards and Quality Assurance

University of Edinburgh

**TEMPUS project: “Strategic support on establishment and development of sustainable structures on quality assurance, international relations and student support services at the newly founded public University of Haxhi Zeka” No. 543801**



# Outline

- What is academic writing?
- Academic writing versus business writing
- What is the process of writing?
- What are the key elements in writing?
- Types of written work
- Key sections of written work
- Approaches to writing
- Short reflective activity



# What is academic writing?

- Academic writing is a formal style of writing and follows some standard conventions.
- Each academic discipline has its own specialist vocabulary which you will be expected to learn and use in your own writing.
- **Note:** The following conventions are general guidelines for academic writing. Be sure to follow the specific requirements for your discipline/assignment.



# Elements of academic writing

- The 'Academic' aspects
  - Discipline content, literature, theories.
- The 'writing' aspects
  - Presentation, readability, active versus passive voice/first versus third person.
- The 'technical' aspects
  - Referencing style, citations, use of sources, diagrams, tables.



# Academic content

- Development of an argument or thesis statement.
- Makes use of appropriate theories.
- Supported by relevant literature.
- Ensures material is well researched/evidence based.
- Ensures all literature and sources of information are correctly acknowledged.
- Uses clear, concise and neutral language.



# Thesis Statement

- The thesis statement expresses the **MAIN IDEA** of your work, the central point that your essay develops/supports.
- Your thesis statement **SHOULD**:
  - Accurately predict your essay's direction, emphasis, and scope
  - Make no promises that the essay will not fulfil
  - Be direct and straightforward.



# Developing paragraphs

- Each body paragraph should contain:
  - Topic Sentence— expresses the main idea of body paragraph.
  - Primary Support—explanation
  - Secondary Support—examples
- Use transitions between paragraphs to link ideas
- Transitions provide the stepping stones your readers need to follow your thinking path





# Active versus Passive Voice

- The use of this varies.
- Some disciplines prefer one over the other.
- In many academic disciplines, writing in the first person (using 'I') is **not** acceptable as it is believed to be too subjective and personal.



# Active-Passive Comparison

## Active Voice

- Personal, first person, third person.
- Use of 'I' and 'we' as the subject.

## Passive Voice

- Impersonal
- The object becomes the focus and subject.

**I suggest that ...**



**The suggestion is made that ...**

**We recommend that ...**



**It is recommended that ...**

**We have considered ...**



**Consideration has been given to ...**



# Types of Academic and Business Writing

- Essays
- Reports
- Dissertations





# Essays

- Tend to present an argument/develop a thesis.
- Focus on evaluating or analysing theories, past research by other people and ideas.
- Rarely include new or original research, but use existing research to present an argument or position.
- Are continuous pieces of prose.
- Are meant to be read carefully.
- Do not generally include recommendations.
- Are mostly used in academic settings.



# Reports

- Present information.
- Present data and findings that you have collected yourself e.g. in an experiment, survey, case study or particular experience.
- Are divided into separate sections.
- Their structure means they can be scanned quickly.
- Often include recommendations for action.
- Are typical of writing produced in the workplace.



# Dissertations/Theses

- Substantial piece of work.
- Includes a formal structure.
- Also includes critical discussion of literature.
- Includes analysis of existing data and knowledge and collection and analysis of new data.
- Offers originality/a contribution to knowledge.
- Identifies implications for theory and practice.



# Key Elements of Written Work

- Title
- Abstract/ Executive Summary/Overview
- Introduction
- Background/Scene Setting
- Literature Review
- Method
- Results/ Analysis
- Discussion
- Conclusion/Recommendations
- References
- Bibliography
- Appendices



# Title Page

- Title is important
- It signals the core focus of the report/essay
- Should not be too long.
- Can make use of main title and sub-title:
  - Pigeon-holing Prospects: The Use of Segmentation in Customer Profiling



# Abstract

- A brief summary of the entire work, generally around 150 - 200 words.
- It is not an introduction.
- Write the abstract after you have written everything.
- It should state: what you've done, why, how and to what effect or purpose.





# Introduction

- Comes at the start of the work.
- It is forward-looking.
- Provides an overview of the context.
- It states the purpose or aim.
- Indicates what will be covered, the content.
- Represents approx. 10% of the overall word length.



# Literature Review

- Not always needed in a standard business report- but required for thesis/dissertation
- Critical evaluation of the literature on the topic or issue of study
- Purpose: acknowledge the body of knowledge that exists and use the discussion to expose or identify gaps for investigation.
- Thus, highlighting the potential contribution to be made.



# Methodology, results, discussion

- Methodology summarises what you did, how you did it and why you did it that way.
- Results describe what you discovered, observed, in your research.
- Discussion - discusses and explains your findings, relating them to previous research.
- Sometimes results and discussion are integrated rather than separated.



# Conclusions & Recommendations

- Conclusion:
  - Sums up the main points.
  - Creates a sense of closure.
  - Should NOT introduce new material.
  - Should draw out implications of the findings – for theory and practice.
- Recommendations
  - suggestions for future action (often found in business reports)
- 10% of the report – significant. Not just a few lines.



# References

- References are all the sources of information that you have directly cited or referred to in the text.
- The way in which references are cited in the text and listed depends on the referencing style used.
- There are many referencing styles – some are discipline-specific. Use the one for your discipline.



# Referencing styles

- **Author-date method**

- According to Jones (2010) the global economy is in turmoil.
- Jones, P. (2010). The State of the Global Economy, *Journal of Global Economics*, 40(3), 55-68.
- All references listed in alphabetical order by author last name.
- <http://www.harvardreferencing.org.uk/>

- **Numeric method**

- It has been noted that the global economy is in turmoil [21].
- [21] P. Jones (2010). The State of the Global Economy, *Journal of Global Economics*, 40(3), 55-68.
- All references listed in numerical order by order of citation.
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vancouver\\_system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vancouver_system)

- **Footnotes method**

- The fact that the global economy is in turmoil has been stated.<sup>1</sup>
- <sup>1</sup> Jones, P. (2010). The State of the Global Economy, *Journal of Global Economics*. 40(3). 55-68.



# Appendices

- Appendices contain material that is too detailed to put in the main body.
- It adds further information.
- Can be read in isolation.
- Appendices should not form part of the essential reading of the report.
- Things to put in an appendix:
  - Questionnaires, interview guides, detailed tables of results (providing the key results are in the main body of the report)



# Academic writing versus Business writing

## • Academic writing

- A formal, structured introduction, including as thesis statement.
- Presentation of an argument, with support from expert sources to highlight the broad contribution to be made.
- Theoretical underpinning to the argument.
- Referencing for all sources used.
- Evidence of the author's position, but without using 'I think' or 'in my opinion'.
- Focus predominantly on the implications for theory and extension of knowledge (but also practice).

## • Business writing

- A short contextualised introductory paragraph.
- A set of objectives or aims rather than an argument.
- Referencing of sources used, but not as extensive.
- Theory not essential, although sometimes referred to.
- Author is not usually present in the writing.
- Focus on the implications for management and business practice.
- Focus on recommended action and implementation.



# Different approaches to writing



**The Watercolourist**



**The Architect**



**The Bricklayer**



**The Oil Painter**



# The Watercolourist



- Able to complete an essay in one sitting.
- Ideas and structure form simultaneously.
- Minimum editing required.
- Useful skill for hand written work in exams!
- Sometimes, editing is desirable!



# The Architect

- Likes to develop a plan.
- Executes the plan.
- Undertakes minimal editing/change.
- Works if you have a clear idea of what you want to say.
- Structure can sometimes inhibit.





# The Bricklayer



- Works with or without a plan.
- Building the work in 'chunks' or 'blocks' that are then joined together.
- Minimal editing.
- A slow process.



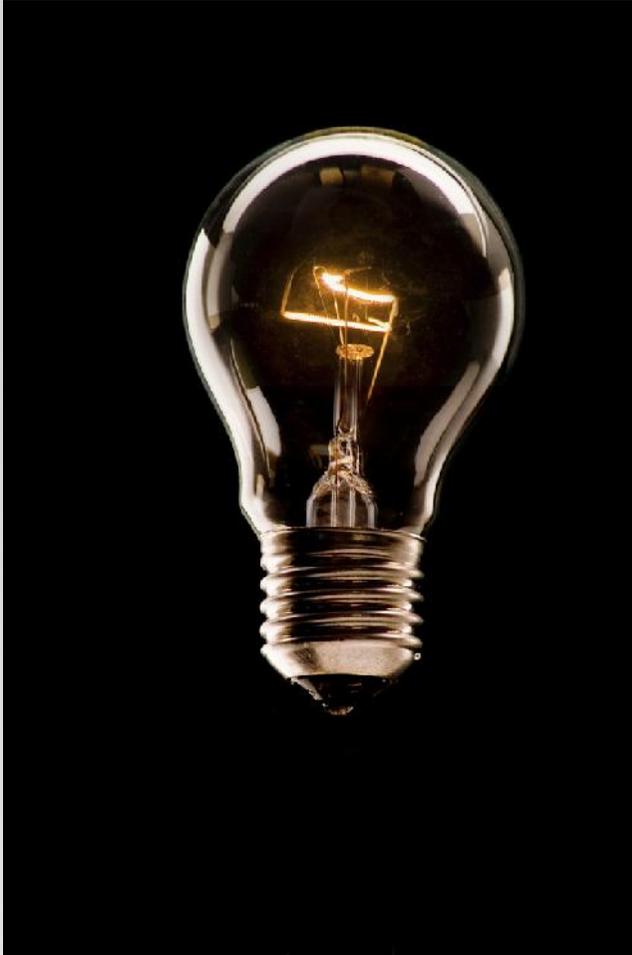
# The Oil Painter

- May have no fixed plan or strategy.
- Sorts out ideas in the act of writing.
- Re-working, adding and editing in the process.
- Useful as a way of developing ideas.
- Can often feel 'unfinished'.





# Activity



- Are you a Watercolourist, Architect, Bricklayer or Oil Painter?
- Discuss in pairs or threes.
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
- How can you learn from each other?