



1

Chapter

Academic Writing

Learning Objectives

1. To learn the definition of academic writing;
2. To learn different categories of academic writing and academic articles;
3. To learn the purposes of academic writing.



1.1

What Is Academic Writing

Academic writing is for the purposes of scholarly communication and academic information dissemination. This kind of writing is usually in an impersonal and dispassionate tone, targeted for a critical and informed audience, based on closely investigated knowledge, and intended to reinforce or challenge concepts or arguments. It usually circulates within the academic world (the academy), but the academic writer may also find an audience outside via journalism, speeches, pamphlets, etc. Typically, academic writing has an objective stance, clearly states the significance of the topic, and is organized with adequate details so that other scholars may try to replicate the results.



1.2

Different Categories of Academic Writing

According to different forms, lengths, contents, and focuses, academic writing can be broadly categorized as the following.

1.2.1 Academic Articles

This form of academic writing is, for most of the time, also termed as research paper. It is an academic work with the length of usually more than 6,000 words, but normally less than 20,000 words. It focuses on a particular problem in a limited research area and aims to tentatively solve the problem through the means of experiment and discussion. It intends to be published in an academic journal. It contains original research results or reviews existing results. Such a paper will only be considered valid if it undergoes a process of peer review by one or more referees (who are academics in the same field) who check that the content of the paper is suitable for publication in the journal. Since the primary task for most of the postgraduates is to publish academic articles, the academic writing in this book mainly refers to academic articles.

1.2.2 Academic Books

Books come in all shapes and sizes, and they serve different purposes. Academic books may include the following subcategories: the popular science book, the edited collection of previously published papers written by the same author, the edited collection of previously published papers written by different authors, the edited collection of original chapters written

by several different authors, the conference collection, and the individually authored book which is the hardest task among the different subcategories and requires your previous contribution.

1.2.3 Conference Papers

Conference papers are academic papers intended to be submitted to national or international academic seminars or conferences. Sometimes, they can also be termed as conference proceedings. The conference paper has been described as essential for nearly all scholarly careers. It is estimated that nearly half of the conference papers published in natural sciences and social sciences finally became published papers—usually within two years or so. Similar results were reported in the field of medicine. More recently, conference papers can be found as preprints in some databases, and such papers were cited twice as frequently as those not posted. Meanwhile, there is also some evidence that presenting papers in seminars and conferences can lead to a shorter refereeing time and a greater success in the refereeing process.

1.2.4 Poster Papers

A poster paper is the rearranged form of an academic paper, which means the academic paper has been condensed into the form of a poster which can be posted and exhibited in national or international academic conferences. Poster papers were initially introduced to ensure that people could still have their work presented at conferences when there was insufficient space for it on the main programme. Most papers on posters concern their design. The figure below shows a typical arrangement for a poster at a scientific conference. Conference organizers usually specify how large a poster can be. A conventional size is about 4 feet (120 cm) wide by 2.5 feet (75 cm) high, but this can vary. It is essential, therefore, to find out what size is allowed before designing a poster.

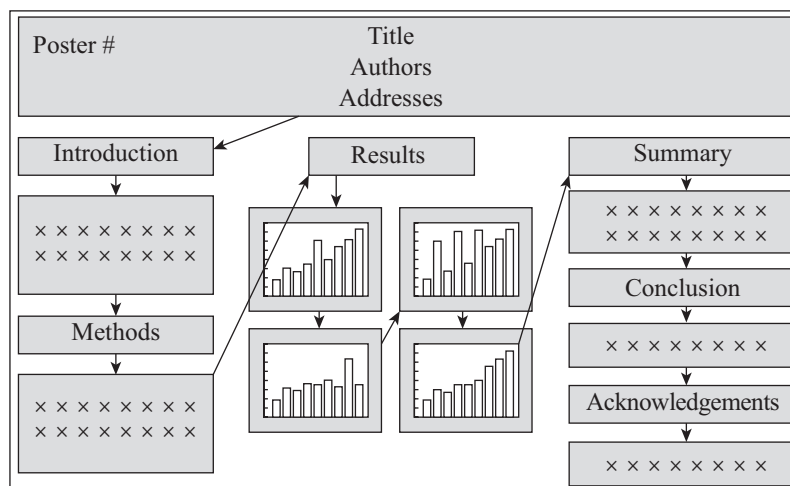


Figure 1-1 Structure of a poster paper



1.3

Different Categories of Academic Articles

There are several types of academic articles and the exact terminologies and definitions may vary by field and specific journal, but academic articles usually include the following categories.

1.3.1 Letters

Letters (also called communications, and not to be confused with letters to the editor) are short descriptions of important current research findings that are usually fast-tracked for immediate publication because they are considered urgent.

1.3.2 Research Notes

Research notes are short descriptions of current research findings that are considered less urgent or important than letters. And normally, research notes are scientifically valid research outputs that cannot be considered as full research or methodology articles.

1.3.3 Articles

Articles are usually between five and twenty pages and are complete descriptions of current research findings, but there are considerable variations between scientific fields and journals. For example, eighty-page articles are not rare in mathematics or theoretical computer science.

1.3.4 Supplemental Articles

Supplemental articles contain a large volume of tabular data that is the result of current research and may have dozens or hundreds of pages with mostly numerical data. Some journals now only publish this data electronically on the Internet.

1.3.5 Review Articles

Review articles do not cover original research but rather accumulate the results of many different articles on a particular topic into a coherent narrative about the state of the art in that field. Review articles provide information about the topic and also provide journal references

to the original research. Reviews may be entirely narrative, or may provide quantitative summary estimates resulting from the application of meta-analytical methods.

1.3.6 Data Papers

Data papers are articles dedicated to describe datasets. This type of article is becoming popular and journals exclusively dedicated to them have been established, e.g. *Scientific Data* and *Earth System Science Data*.

1.3.7 Video Papers

Video papers are a recent addition to exercises of scientific publications. They most often combine an online video demonstration of a new technique or protocol with a rigorous textual description.



1.4 Purposes of Academic Writing

Firstly and most importantly, academic writing serves as permanent and transparent forums for the presentation, scrutiny, and discussion of research. Chinese philosopher Confucius once said, “Non-elegant words will not be popular”, which emphasized the importance of formal recording of thoughts. After heavy and tedious lab work, you must have had some methods or some ideas based on the series of experimental work implemented. Keeping all these methods and ideas to yourself is no good for scientific development, and the only way to make more contributions to this development is to present and share all the work you have done. Suppose Marie Curie had kept all her experimental work concerning Ra as a secret, human beings would have suffered much more from cancer disease, and suppose Elbert Einstein had not published his academic articles on relativity, man’s knowledge of the world would have still been quite limited. The examples of these great scientists and their work showed enough the significance of academic writing. Besides, once the academic writing is published, it will be carefully read by academic audience, and their attitudes and sometimes criticism will greatly help you to make necessary changes. Consequently, you may do a better job in your scientific research.

Academic writing is usually an immensely personally rewarding activity that can offer you a sense of progress, closure as you finish one phase of your research, achievement, and pride in yourself and your work.



If you do not do academic writing, you will fail to engage in wider academic debates or add to the body of publicly available knowledge in your field, which is one of the primary purposes of undertaking research in the first place. Remember that reading other people's refereed work helps academics to develop their own thinking, research, and teaching.

The rigorous review processes that your writing will undergo will give the paper a certain standing or quality mark. It is rare for papers to emerge from the review processes unimproved even if some authors are reluctant to admit it. Readers are likely to trust something that is as well written as it can be and that they know has been subject to scrutiny. This is especially the case if you are trying to influence non-academic readers who might use or engage with your research.

Quite simply, academic writing helps you to build your reputation and that of your research in your field. This may be crucial to getting new jobs or promotion.

Exercises

1. Surf the Internet to find a full length article in your research area. Read it three times and get familiar with both the content and the form of the academic article.
2. Convert the article you have read to the form of a poster paper.



2

Chapter

The Process of Academic Writing

Learning Objectives

1. To understand academic writing as a process;
2. To learn different stages in the process of academic writing and different activities at each stage.



Academic Writing as a Process

It is well acknowledged that writing in essence is and should be a process instead of a product. Only when we consider writing as a process can we derive great pleasure and benefits from it. A typical writing process usually consists of several stages, including pre-writing, drafting, peer-reading and teacher's feedback, revision, and follow-ups. Academic writing is the same case and meanwhile, for its academic features, the process of academic writing possesses some unique features and it can quite often be more time-consuming and deserves more of your efforts.

Academic writing constitutes a hierarchy of overlapping processes or levels. At the bottom level, students put pen to paper or their fingers to the keyboard. The second level incorporates the thinking that enables the text to be written and revised. At the third level, one must consider the social context of the paper, including its target group, purpose, and suitability for publication. At the bottom, keyboarding level, it is useful for students to keep track of the changes they make and versions they produce. Earlier versions may not only contain important information but also mistakes and problems from which the students can learn. At the second, writing and thinking level, students should be encouraged to make notes on what they are writing and thinking about during the writing process. In this way, they become conscious of the reasons for and the nature of the decisions they make and can trace progression in their thinking and writing. Such notes are also helpful when discussing with their peers. The social aspects of academic writing, the third level, include the purposes of writing and can be divided into those that encourage the desire, for example, to create new knowledge or gain approval, and those that impair the progress, such as problems in getting started, revising the text, finding one's voice and feeling inadequate.

It is strongly argued that factors that facilitate and inhibit writing are strongly influenced by environmental issues, such as the time available to write. By dividing the writing task into identifiable levels and specifying deadlines for these, students are given sub-goals; their work is marked at regular intervals throughout the writing process; and feedback is obtained from both the teacher and peers. In this way, students are better able to control the environmental factors that influence their work. At the same time, they receive intrinsic rewards such as personal satisfaction because they see that they are making progress. In addition, they receive extrinsic rewards as the teacher and peers are able to point to important steps forward in the research and writing processes.

In this chapter, we will mainly focus on what an academic author has to do at different stages of an academic writing process.

**2.2****Different Stages in the Process of Academic Writing**

The specific procedures of academic writing may vary from person to person, yet a typical academic writing process may pass through the following stages. Stage one is doing research, reading, getting some ideas, and starting to write. Stage two is academic writing per se. Stage three is sending papers to conferences and seminars. Stage four is targeting a journal. Stage five is preparing your paper for submission. Stage six is the reviewing process. Stage seven is technicalities of proofs and copyright. Among all these stages, only the third stage can be skipped while all the other stages are indispensable for the successful publication of your paper.

In the following part, each stage and the concerning tasks will be illuminated in details.

2.2.1 Preparation for Writing**(1) Doing Research**

Doing research lays a solid foundation for your academic writing. It means different things for different disciplines. For humanities, such as literature and philosophy, doing research most probably means extensive reading, which can help you to get familiar with background information and theoretical framework. For social sciences like sociology and archaeology, the main approaches adopted for research may include investigation and field study. For natural sciences, the research work is, with almost no exception, tedious, painstaking, but highly rewarding experiments in the lab. For engineering, the research work is normally design. Nowadays, with the rapid development of so many interdisciplinary areas, the combination of different research methods is not a rare case.

(2) Reading

No matter what research area and method you take, reading academic works proves once and again another basic work you have to do at the initial stage of academic writing. Academic reading helps you to know what has been done and what is being done in your specific research field. And more importantly, it sometimes can be the direct source of your ideas. Academic reading is so important that we will specially introduce some academic reading skills and how to find academic resources in Chapter 3.



(3) Getting Some Ideas

After reading academic works and research work, what you have to do next is to get some ideas. Both convergent thinking and divergent thinking can help you to have some creative ideas on the basis of your reading and research work. Divergent thinking is a thought process or method used to generate creative ideas by exploring many possible solutions. It typically occurs in such a spontaneous, free-flowing, non-linear manner, that many ideas are generated in an emergent cognitive fashion. Many possible solutions are explored in a short amount of time, and unexpected connections are drawn. In a certain sense, divergent thinking stimulates creative ideas by increasing possibilities. For example, when you are researching the influencing factors of local economy, it is better for you to think as many factors as possible and a new factor can be possibly found in the process.

By contrast, convergent thinking is the type of thinking that focuses on coming up with the single, well-established answer to a problem. It is oriented toward deriving the single best, or most often correct answer to a question. Convergent thinking emphasizes speed, accuracy, and logic and focuses on recognizing the familiar, reapplying techniques, and accumulating stored information. It is most effective in situations where an answer readily exists and simply needs to be either recalled or worked out through decision-making strategies. A critical aspect of convergent thinking is that it leads to a single best answer, leaving no room for ambiguity. In this view, answers are either right or wrong. The solution that is derived at the end of the convergent thinking process is the best possible answer for the majority of the time. In a certain sense, convergent thinking is to stimulate creative ideas through increasing precision. For example, when you are doing research concerning GIS, if the existing software cannot precisely predict the geological information, what you have to do is to find the bug and make improvements.

The following two maps illustrate divergent thinking and convergent thinking:

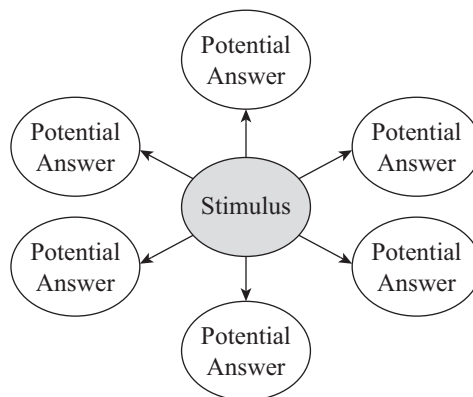


Figure 2-1 Divergent thinking

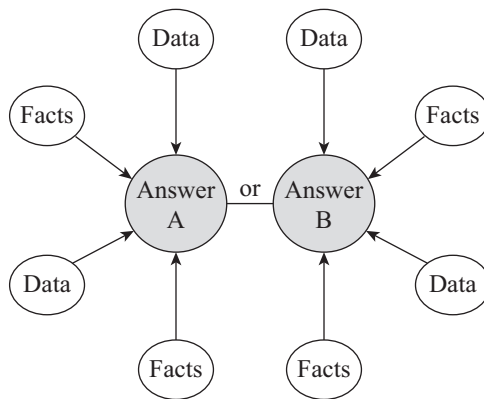


Figure 2-2 Convergent thinking

Besides these two basic thinking modes which are conducive to creative ideas, the most effective way to encourage original thoughts is brainstorming. Brainstorming is a group creativity technique by which efforts are made to find a conclusion for a specific problem by gathering a list of ideas spontaneously contributed by its members. It can be clearly seen that the core of brainstorming is to exchange ideas in the research team. Thus you are encouraged to discuss more and even debate more with other members. The importance of brainstorming can be best illustrated in the saying that “If you have an apple and I have an apple, we exchange and both of us still have one apple; if you have an idea and I have an idea, we exchange and then both of us double.”

(4) Starting to Write

Now you have finished your research work and got some ideas, the next step is to start your academic writing. However, to get to start can be the most difficult thing for doing anything. Before you get started, bear these two sentences in your minds:

- Writing does get easier with practice.
- The perfect conditions in which you are ready to write do not exist. Writing is an on-going and iterative process.

2.2.2 Academic Writing Per Se

Remember that writing often does not come easily. Be patient and start with getting your ideas down on paper. After the first draft, you can work on refining it. If you have already made summaries and notes, the process of writing your essay may be easier. However, if you have difficulty, try writing some headings that are relevant to the essay topic—perhaps they summarize each of the main points you want to make, or perhaps they are just words that have some relevance to the topic. Under each heading, start summarizing information from one



book or a study guide to reading. Suspend the need to connect your writing to other readings or parts of the essay. Just write. Trying to control the way your essay will look and its structure early on can waste time because, as you write more and read more, you end up developing groups of information that you can link together due to similar features they have in common. However, doing this at the beginning is difficult as you cannot see the overall picture and you are just starting out and your knowledge of the essay topic has not had sufficient time to develop. Uncertainty at the beginning is perfectly acceptable and normal. Once you are more familiar with the issues, it becomes easier to work out the main themes or sections and even the order to place them. What is important though is writing down information in your own words, so that you have something to show at the end of your reading and analysis.

Look over your essay to make sure that you have answered the essay question. Have you stuck to the topic? Have you left out anything vital? You may have to revise your essay several times before it effectively addresses the topic and the question.

Try to leave yourself at least 24 hours between finishing your first draft and revision. This will allow you to have time to distance yourself from the topic and reflect on it with a critical eye. It is also really useful if you can get access to someone who is not doing the course to have a read over your assignment and see if it makes sense. If he understands it, then your marker should understand it. Take note of anything this person does not understand, because it may suggest that you need to further clarify and explain some details. Providing such extra details can only reinforce the impression of what you know and understand to the marker.

After finishing your essay, you should check for errors (punctuation, spelling, grammar), bad sentence structures, jargon, slang, etc. You should also check these questions: Is your presentation OK? Can it be improved? Is the referencing correct?

2.2.3 Sending Papers to Conferences and Seminars

After drafting and revision, quite like the normal writing process, the next stage is to send your papers to conferences and seminars. Once you have developed a paper, you really need to take it on the road—taking it to conferences, seminars, and workshops. It is important to use conferences, seminars, and workshops as a way of getting feedback so that you can reflect on, refine, and polish your paper until you have buffed it up enough to be sent to a journal. You can be sure that if you keep getting similar adverse comments when you present the paper, your reviewers will also discern the weaknesses when you submit it unless you have resolved the problems. It may be a matter of explaining more carefully what you mean or addressing more fundamental issues. On the other hand, if your paper stimulates lively discussion and interest, it signals that you have struck a rich seam from which to publish. Be careful to take good notes on what people say about your work. Write these up either during your session or immediately afterwards.

2.2.4 Targeting a Journal

You have written a paper that has been well aired, commented upon, and subsequently and iteratively improved. Now you need to identify an appropriate journal to eventually send it to. Finding the right journal takes time and effort. But investment at this stage will save you much energy and grief later on. Not all journals, as you will be aware, are the same. They embody different areas of interest, styles, methodologies, aims, and objectives. You must achieve a reasonable degree of congruence between your paper and the target journal. Inevitably, this involves some compromises in both how you rewrite the paper and the journal you try to get published in.

2.2.5 Preparing Your Paper for Submission

The task of preparing your paper for submission to a journal is quite complex. Preparing a paper for submission involves the synthesis of three important constituent elements: your pre-existing paper, the feedback that you have received on it, and the specific requirements and characteristics of your target journal. We call this process “drafting and crafting”. What you will be doing is gently molding your paper so that it is beautifully written, academically robust, and irresistible to your target journal. When you have done this, you will need one last round of polishing before your “baby” is ready to go off. For this stage, you should already have the draft paper, feedback, and journal requirements to hand. You cannot start without them. There are two key aspects to drafting and crafting: content and form. Both need to be carefully addressed if you are to be successful in getting your work published.

2.2.6 Reviewing Process

Once you have submitted your paper, it enters the reviewing process. How long the process lasts mainly depends on journals. When the journal editor receives your paper, the first thing that he will do is to give it a quick read-over. A good editor who is unhappy with your paper at this stage will send it back to you with a letter of explanation. Once the editor is satisfied, he will do two things. First, he will send you an acknowledgement informing you that he has received your paper and will send it out for review. Second, he (or his administrative assistant) will remove the title page with your name on it from the manuscript. The editor will then give it a reference number, send it to at least two selected referees together with the journal’s evaluation sheet, and ask them to comment on various aspects of your paper and to indicate whether it is publishable. Once the editor has, eventually, received the reviewers’ comments, he can make a judgment about what will happen to your paper. Different sorts of the editor’s decisions are possible. Scenario 1, and very unlikely, your paper may be accepted as it stands with no revisions or amendments. Scenario 2, the editor may accept the paper subject



to relatively minor amendments that do not require it to be sent out for review again. Scenario 3, and a very common category, you may be asked to make major revisions and then resubmit for reconsideration by reviewers. Scenario 4, your paper may be rejected outright.

2.2.7 Technicalities of Proofs and Copyright

Once your paper has finally been accepted, you will probably wait for a long time (and may actually be one) before anything seems to happen. Editors like to have a substantial number of accepted papers “in the bag” in order to give themselves flexibility in putting each edition of the journal together and to save themselves from nightmares about not having enough papers to publish. It usually goes something like this: when you are least expecting it, or when you are about to go on holiday, you will receive the printer’s proofs, which are copy pages of the paper as it will appear on the page in the published journal. The proofs are very likely to be sent electronically as a read-only PDF file nowadays. The editor will ask you to check the proofs for spelling errors, serious omissions of chunks of text, missing or inaccurate references, etc. If you have done your job properly up to now, you should have very little work to do at this stage unless something has gone wrong with the typesetting—unlikely, but it does happen. However, you do need to proofread it very carefully and do not get so carried away with the beauty of your own prose that you miss glaring typos. Editors will be furious with you if, at this stage, you seek to make amendments (rather than typographical corrections) to the text. And rightly so—the technicalities of actually putting a journal together are immense and amendments at this stage can be financially costly. If you do need to make an amendment, you should have careful and sensitive negotiations with the editor to see if it is feasible. Along with the proofs, you will receive a copyright assignment form. You and any co-authors will be asked to sign the form and return it with the proofs. This form is very important, as without it the publishers will not go to press with your article in case you sue them for a breach of copyright. Both the proofs and the copyright matters need to be dealt with as a matter of urgency—usually within two or three days of the receipt.



Exercises

1. Discuss a specific topic in your research area by means of divergent thinking and convergent thinking with your partner.
2. The following is the first draft of an academic writing by a student. Discuss with your partner to identify the main logical and grammatical problems of the writing.

The Simulation of Water Erosion Process in Loess Plateau Based on GeoCA

The Loess Plateau becomes one of the most serious area of soil erosion in China for its unique morphology and climate characteristics. Gully erosion, as one of the most common types of the soil erosion, is a major cause of soil erosion on the Loess Plateau, which plays an important role in shaping the Loess Plateau terrain. From aspects including the gully erosion mechanism, the impact factor, developing process monitoring, erosion and sediment yield prediction model of gully erosion, gully erosion a discussed in many ways by former research. However, because of the limitation of research methods and technical means, the researches on gully erosion process in space and time are still insufficient. Geographical cellular automate (GeoCA), having a distinct temporal coupling characteristic, is suitable for dynamic process simulation of geographical spatial system. The preliminary researches suggested that GeoCA can better simulate the development of gully in watershed of loess.

This research aims to simulate the hydro-erosion process of gully based on DEMs, with GeoCA method, the artificial simulation watershed for experimental data, the formulation is given priority to with kinetic formula transformation rules, build the loess gully erosion of small watershed based on GeoCA CA model. On this basis, the simulation and analysis of small watershed gully erosion process, with specific examples demonstrating the validity of the model and simulation accuracy, and compared with the existing research methods.

In this research, the main contents and conclusions are as follows:

(1) Build the GeoCA Model of Loess Gully Hydro-Erosion of Small Watershed

This research designs GeoCA transformation rules based on the physical process of gully hydro-erosion, in view of the basic theory of gully hydro-erosion and GeoCA. The emphasis is to study the mathematical model of the transformation rules and its expression. In line with the flow characteristics on DEMs, the model only considers the influence of the surface run-off on erosion process. According to the differences of erosion intensity, the gully erosion process is divided into slope surface erosion and gully erosion. Due to the complexity of the gully erosion process, the model makes downward erosion in the process of water erosion process as the main simulation process. As discussed above, the implement process was designed and the GeoCA model of loess gully erosion of small watershed was implemented.

(2) The Dynamic Process Simulation of the Gully Hydro-Erosion CA Model

In this study, the artificial small watershed was applied as the experimental data to simulate the gully hydro-erosion process with the model. The experiment is divided into single phase and multiphase in the simulation of hydro-erosion process. And the multiphase simulation results were compared with measured results. The simulation results showed no obvious changes in the shape of the valleys during the hydro-erosion process. Instead, the elevation values continuing the downward trend. The great error concentrated along the gully shoulder lines because of the model



without consideration of lateral erosion and headward erosion.

(3) The Validation of the Gully Hydro-Erosion CA Model

To test and verify the simulation ability of the model, this study compared the simulation results with the measured results and data mining model's simulation. And the comparison indicates that the model proposed in this research is better than others with the gully length, width, groove depth, and the errors of the measured results were less than 30%. In addition, the erosion intensity and erosion volume are smaller than the measured results. In comparison with the data mining model, this model has higher precision. Besides, this model is closer to real erosion process, in terms of altitude changes.

To sum up, this research was based on the study of the gully erosion, combining with geographical cellular automata method, and constructed gully hydro-erosion CA model to solve the problem of the dynamic simulation of the gully erosion. This research distinguished the type of the gully hydro-erosion process. According to the differences of hydro-erosion in different terrain conditions, different model transformation rules were used, so as to improve the simulation of gully hydro-erosion process.

3

Chapter

Academic Reading and Academic Resources

Learning Objectives

1. To learn the significance of academic reading to academic writing;
2. To form habits and acquire skills for academic reading;
3. To learn how to find academic resources.



3.1

Significance of Academic Reading to Academic Writing

Reading and writing can mutually benefit as reading focuses on information input while writing focuses on information output. Like little children, before they can write, they have to be able to read and, in your case, before you can do academic writing, you have to first learn how to form habits of and be skilled in academic reading.

Briefly, academic reading can benefit academic writing in the following three senses. First, only after a careful and extensive reading in your specific area can you have a good knowledge of what others have done and are doing and make clear what you are going to do. Second, academic reading may provide you with some hints that can encourage you to have some creative ideas. Third, by continuous academic reading, you may better understand the normal pattern of academic writing style and specific terminology in your specific area. Since academic reading is very important to academic writing, what we have to do next is to introduce some habits and skills for academic reading and give some suggestions on how to find academic resources.



3.2

Habits and Skills for Academic Reading

Your reading needs to be systematic and rigorous. If you are developing good research skills, it is highly likely that you will have begun to develop good reading skills, as you cannot have the first without the second.

3.2.1 Forming the Habit of Reading

All academics have really busy lives. Things like reading regularly that will augment your basic knowledge (as opposed to reading things you have to) often slip off the edge of our mental in trays. Try to avoid relegating this activity to those non-existent periods when you “have time” by building a regular reading slot into every working day or, at least, into every working week. This is far from easy, and you may have to be determined and ingenious to achieve it. Our experience is that if you intend to do your academic reading at bedtime, then it just does not happen—you fall asleep before you have finished the first page.

3.2.2 Reading Actively, Not Passively

It is treacherously easy to believe that you are really reading when in actual fact you are not. Your eyes go over the words, but by the end of the chapter you have forgotten the beginning of it because you read it as if you were reading a novel. When you read an academic work, you need to engage actively with the material by interrogating it. Ask yourself questions as you go along: Do I really agree with this? How convincing is this argument? What holes can I pick in that one? What would I say to the author if he was explaining his ideas to me in person? How can I make use of these ideas or data to form my own? What key concept is the author working with and why? If you read actively in this way, your reading will be of positive benefit in keeping up with the development of knowledge in your particular field.

Reading done properly and effectively is very time-consuming. It is a good idea to avoid redundant reading by quickly skimming through a text first of all, checking that it is what you expect and likely to be of use to you. In journal articles, the abstract at the beginning (and often available on the publishers' web pages) is there specifically to help you decide whether you want to read the whole thing in depth or not. With books, use the contents page and the index intelligently to decide whether to read the book or not. It never ceases to amaze us how many students we come across have absolutely no notion of indexes, let alone how to use them. We harbor the suspicion that many of these students eventually become academics with the same lacunae of knowledge. Reading the introduction quickly, especially of an edited collection where the editor discusses the contents and draws them together, can also help.

Once you have skimmed a text, do not think that you have actually read it. Skimming enables you to make a decision about whether to invest the time in detailed and proper reading. Unfortunately, we have discovered that there is no natural osmosis from text to head, either by leaving books on your shelf for months or years or placing them under your pillow at night. There is really no substitute for reading.

Good writers usually devote significant efforts to structuring their writing carefully and leaving plenty of signposts for the reader, to let them know how the structure of the piece works. It is a foolish reader who ignores this thoughtful help. Use sections and signposts to divide up your reading and note-taking efforts and to make it explicit to yourself what the structure of the argument is. This may be particularly important when you are reading complex or difficult pieces in which you encounter new and challenging ideas.

There are some tips you may follow when you are reading. For example, you can summarize each section of a book with the book closed to check whether you have grasped the main idea; you can work out what each paragraph is saying and make a note of that as you go along; you can heavily mark the bits of interest and indicate in the margin that they link with your current research or teaching so that you can return to these later to write notes on the links.

If you can write your own abstract of someone else's article or chapter when you get to the



end of reading it, you can be pretty sure that you have read it thoroughly and intelligently and will not forget what it says. That means you will be able to use it in future without having to reread it several times.

3.2.3 Developing a Critical Eye for Writing Style

When reading actively, do not just concentrate on the academic content and argument. Develop a keen critical eye, or rather ear, for different genres of academic writing. Recognize elliptical and obscure prose for what it is and stop yourself from slipping into a similar trap. Learn from others about how to express complex and difficult ideas in clear, albeit sophisticated, ways. Learn to distinguish between academic writing that is necessarily complex and therefore difficult to read, and that is just plain showing-off or sloppiness. Just as you would not expect a motor mechanic to talk about a car engine without using technical terms for its constituent parts, so academic disciplines have their own particular languages that you must learn and use sensibly. Develop a keen eye for what a well-structured piece of writing looks like. Most disciplines have tacit writing formats and you need to learn how these work in your discipline and how to deploy them. Above all, use your reading to learn about style, language, and format in your field and to think about how you will develop your own distinctive version of these. Find authors whose writing moves, inspires, and stimulates you, and analyze what is good about it. Learn your lessons from that.

3.2.4 Taking Notes

Your reading will be far more productive and yield longer-term benefits if you keep good notes of what you have read and what is in it. Make a careful record of the bibliographic details of your reading sufficient for you to cite the material in anything that you write, thus saving you time. It will also let you find the material again if you do not have your own copy. Keep systematic notes. Avoid, at all costs, extensive details and exact copying of whole paragraphs. Everyone has his own system of note-taking and you have to do what suits you best.



3.3

How to Find Academic Resources Online

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