

**INSIDE TRACK**

**SUCCESSFUL  
ACADEMIC  
WRITING**

**ANDY GILLETT, ANGELA HAMMOND  
& MARY MARTALA**

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# INSIDE TRACK

## SUCCESSFUL ACADEMIC WRITING

Andy Gillett, Angela Hammond  
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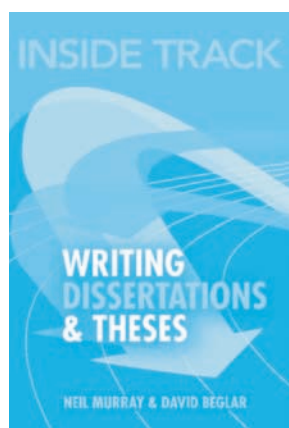
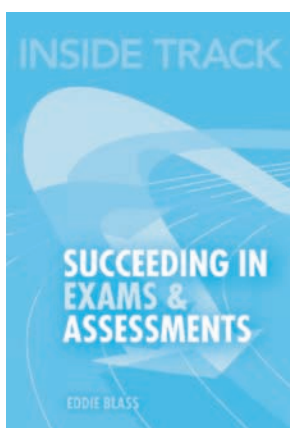
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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The authors all work in the School of Combined Studies at the University of Hertfordshire where they teach academic writing, research and study skills as well as a range of language and education courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level. They have a wide range of experience working in universities, colleges, as well as private and government organisations and companies both in the UK and abroad.

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Quinn, F. 2008) p. 185; Activity 8.7b from *Psychology*, 3rd ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Martin, N, Carlson, N.R and Buskist W 2007) p. 376; Worked Example 8.7b from *Psychology*, 3rd ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Martin, N., Carlson, N.R. and Buskist, W. 2007) p. 376; Worked Example 8.7c from *Social Work*, 1st ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Wilson, K., Ruch, G., Lymbery, M. and Cooper, A. 2008) p. 540; Worked Examples 8.8a, 8.8a from *Social Work*, 1st ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Wilson, K., Ruch, G., Lymbery, M. and Cooper, A. 2008) p. 566; Worked Examples 8.8b, 8.8b from *Physical Geography and the Environment*, 2nd ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Holden, J. 2008) p. 480; Activity 8.9 from *Hughes' Electrical and Electronic Technology*, 10th ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Hughes, E., Hiley, J., Brown, K. and McKenzie-Smith, I. 2008) p. 818; Worked Example 8.9 from *Hughes' Electrical and Electronic Technology*, 10th ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Hughes, E., Hiley, J., Brown, K. and McKenzie-Smith, I. 2008) p. 818; Worked Example 8.10 from *Hughes' Electrical and Electronic Technology*, 10th ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Hughes, E., Hiley, J., Brown, K. and McKenzie-Smith, I. 2008) p. 814; Worked Example 8.11 from *Principles of Marketing*, 4th ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Brassington, F. and Pettit, S. 2006); Activity 8.12 from *Psychology*, 3rd ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Martin, N, Carlson, N.R. and Buskist, W. 2007) p. 486; Worked Example 8.12 from *Psychology*, 3rd ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Martin, N., Carlson, N.R and Buskist, W. 2007) p. 486; Worked Example 8.13 from *Social Work*, 1st ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Wilson, K., Ruch, G., Lymbery, M. and Cooper, A. 2008) p. 566; Activity 8.13a from *Social Work*, 1st ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Wilson, K., Ruch, G., Lymber, M. and Cooper, A. 2008) p. 566; Activity 8.13b from *Principles of Marketing*, 5th ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Kotler, P., Armstrong, G., Wong, V. and Saunders, J. 2006) p. 326; Activity 8.15 from *Physical Geography and the Environment*, 2nd ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Holden, J. 2008) p. 59; Worked Example 8.16a from *Physical Geography and the Environment*, 2nd ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Holden, J. 2008) p. 406; Activity 8.16a from *Physical Geography and the Environment*, 2nd ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Holden, J. 2008) p. 406; Worked Example 8.16b from *Physical Geography and the Environment*, 2nd ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Holden, J. 2008) p. 302; Activity 8.16b from *Physical Geography and the Environment*, 2nd ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Holden, J. 2008) p. 302; Activity 8.17 from *Principles of Marketing*, 5th ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Kotler, P., Armstrong, G., Wong, V., and Saunders, J. 2008) p. 326; Activity 8.18 from *Hughes' Electrical and Electronic Technology*, 10th ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Hughes, J., Hiley, J., Brown, K. McKenzie-Smith, I. 2008) p. 810; Worked Example 8.19 from *The Essential Guide to Teaching*, 1st ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Davies, S. 2006); Extract on page 164 from *Fundamentals of Nursing*, 1st ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Kozier et al. 2008) p. 140; Activity 9.2 from *Psychology*, 3rd ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Martin, N., Carlson, N.R. and Buskist, W. 2007) p. 298; General Displayed Text on page 183 from *Business Law*, 8th ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Keenan, D. and Riches, S. 2007) p. 114; Extract on page 186 from *Physical Geography and the Environment*, 2nd ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Holden, J. 2008) p. 57; Activity 10.5 from *Physical Geography and the Environment*, 2nd ed.,

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Harlow: Pearson Education (Holden, J. 2008) pp. 612-13; Activity 10.6 from *English Legal System*, 9th ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Elliot, C. and Quinn, C. 2008) p. 413; Activity 10.7 from *Fundamentals of Nursing*, 1st ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Kozier et al. 2008) p. 489; Activity 10.10a from *Social Work*, 1st ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Wilson, K., Ruch, G., Lymberty, M. and Cooper, A. 2008) p. 502; Activity 10.10b from *Principles of Marketing*, 5th ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Kotler, P., Armstrong, G., Wong, V. and Saunders, J. 2008) p. 693; Example on page 213 from *Psychology*, 3rd ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Martin, N., Carlson, N.R. and Buskist, W. 2007) p. 491; Activity 11.1a from *Psychology*, 3rd ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Martin, N., Carlson, N.R. and Buskist, W. 2007) p. 420; Activity 11.1b from *Social Work*, 1st ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Wilson, K., Ruch, G., Lymberty, M. and Cooper, A. 2008) p. 324; Activity 11.3 from *Psychology*, 3rd ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Martin, N., Carlson, N.R. and Buskist, W. 2007) p. 420; Activity 11.5 from *Psychology*, 3rd ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Martin, N., Carlson, N.R. and Buskist, W. 2007) p. 491; Activity 11.8 from *Psychology*, 3rd ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Martin, N., Carlsson, N.R. and Buskist, W. 2007) p. 486; Worked Example 11.8 from *Psychology*, 3rd ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Martin, N., Carlson, N.R. and Buskist, W. 2007) p. 486; Box on page 277 from *Business Law*, 8th ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Keenan, D. and Riches, S. 2007) p. 29; Activity 15.3 from *Social Work*, 1st ed., Harlow: Pearson Education (Wilson, K., Ruch, G., Lymberty, M. and Cooper, A. 2008) p. 310.

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# INTRODUCTION

## Writing in higher education

You would probably accept that you have to write in different ways throughout your lives. But why do you need to learn about academic writing? Considering one of the main ways you are assessed in higher education is through your writing, either by coursework or exams, knowing how to express yourself well, in good, written academic English is crucial. When you are a student, you will find that your tutors use your writing to gauge how much you have learned and understood about a particular subject and to judge the quality of your thinking. But you should not only see academic writing as an assessment tool. Writing is also indirectly encouraging you to read widely, think critically, improve your communication skills and develop a certain level of competence and professionalism needed for your future career.

In academic writing it is often assumed that by the time students have finished secondary school education, they already possess the skills to write at a level appropriate to higher education, but this is not always the case. As a result, when students are faced with written assignments of anything upward of 1500 words they may find the whole process daunting. The aim of this book is to provide tools to address this.

Academic writing is a social practice. This means that you always write with a readership in mind and you always write with a purpose, for example to explain or to persuade. It also means that what is right and wrong, appropriate or inappropriate is defined by the users in the social community. In your case these are other students, lecturers or examiners. There is nothing natural about the organisation and the way language is used in a scientific report, for example. It is as it is because that is the way it has developed through centuries of use by practitioners. For that reason it has to be learned. No-one speaks (or writes) academic English as a first language (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1994: 8). It must be learned by observation, study and experiment.

In higher education, you will be required to complete a wide range of writing tasks, some which will be familiar to you, but some which will not. You may, for example, have written essays before, but never completed a reflective log. Whatever the task, remember that writing is a process which leads to a final product. It starts from understanding what you have to do and planning your work. It then goes on to doing the reading and any necessary research. The next stage is writing various drafts. This is followed by proof-reading and editing. All this, taking into account the feedback you may receive, should lead to the final text.

### How this book is organised

In this book, we are addressing various aspects of writing in higher education and trying to answer two main questions:

- 1 What kinds of texts are expected of students in higher education and what sort of language is used in them?
- 2 How should students go about preparing for, researching and writing these texts?

We know the process of academic writing is complicated and not necessarily straightforward. You may be very good at planning but you may have trouble writing in the correct style, for example. For this reason, we do not necessarily expect you to work through the book chapter by chapter. To help you decide on which aspects you need, we have included both a section with questions that you may like answered, and a flow chart (see p. xxiv) to guide you through the various chapters of the book. This approach will allow you to dip in and out of the book as and when you need help.

Our approach in this book is to show you examples of the kind of writing we want you to do and help you to notice the relevant features of it. We then give you activities to try and offer you some feedback. Some activities will help you to notice the kind of language or skill we hope you will develop. Other activities will ask you to write something. It is very difficult for us to give you useful feedback in these freer writing situations. We hope, though, that by giving a suggested solution to the activity, you will:

- look at what we have offered
- compare it to what you have written
- notice something that we have done but you have not done yourself, and
- possibly use it next time you write.

### The chapters

The book begins with a chapter which looks at the major features you will find in the rest of the book. It explains how academic writing is different from other forms of writing and introduces various styles of academic writing, or genres, that may be used in a range of disciplines.

Chapter 2 works on the principle that when you are given an assignment to write, you might have initial doubts as to how to approach this task. The chapter offers you some tools to help you overcome that beginning stage of apprehension.

Chapter 3 addresses the process of planning and preparation that is integral to successful academic writing. It covers looking behind an assignment, deciding upon preparatory work and planning your time.

Chapter 4 helps you research your topic. It suggests ways in which you can find information and ideas from other sources that you could then bring in to your own work.

Chapter 5 asks you to consider effective reading strategies, before moving on to looking at keeping a record of what you read by using various note-taking methods.

Chapter 6 covers the style conventions of an academic text, developing paragraphs and turning them into organised and cohesive text, writing plans and writing drafts.

Chapter 7 focuses on descriptive writing. It includes defining a topic, describing an object, system or process. It also includes categorising and classifying as well as reporting past events.

Chapter 8 focuses on writing critically. This is broken down by looking at texts that explain and justify and then move on to texts that analyse and evaluate.

Chapter 9 looks at the type of language that is used to write reflectively and suggests some frameworks to help you develop this way of writing.

Chapter 10 helps you use other people's ideas to support the points that you make or the arguments that you raise in your assignments.

Chapter 11 looks at the place of the writer in a piece of academic writing and highlights that apart from including the work of others, it is essential to keep your own ideas clear.

Chapter 12 focuses on providing advice on how to use different genres. It points out that most genres of writing use a range of text types for their purpose.

Chapter 13 considers ways of presenting your work. This includes effective use of computers, writing by hand and adapting a text for use in oral presentations and the writing of posters.

Chapter 14 looks at ways in which you can make the best use of the feedback you receive from your lecturers in order to improve your marks.

Chapter 15 looks at the final stage of the writing process, the stage of proof-reading, editing and presentation. It emphasises the importance of this stage in helping you to make a good impression.

We strongly believe that as well as knowing their subject, professionals need to be able to communicate clearly, accurately and appropriately. Communication is more than just providing ideas and information: it is an essential feature of being a professional. Writing well is part of this and we hope we can help you achieve this skill.

## The example texts

We believe that you learn to write by reading and noticing features of written texts in that reading and then trying, with help, to produce similar texts yourself. One feature of this book is the number of examples we have used of the kinds of text that you will be expected to write. Some of these we have written ourselves, some are from our students but most of them have been adapted by us from a range of Pearson's undergraduate textbooks. We know the readers of this book will be studying a wide range of subjects so we have tried to give examples from a similar

## Introduction

wide range of topics. We have also used the following books for reading and other activities.

Brassington, F. and Pettitt, S. (2006) *Principles of Marketing* (4th edn). Harlow: Pearson Education.

Davies, S. (2006) *The Essential Guide to Teaching*. Harlow: Pearson Education.

Elliott, C. and Quinn, F. (2008) *English Legal System* (9th edn). Harlow: Pearson Education.

Holden, J. (ed.) (2008) *Physical Geography and the Environment* (2nd edn). Harlow: Pearson Education.

Hughes, E. (2008) *Hughes Electrical and Electronic Technology* (10th edn). Harlow: Pearson Education.

Keenan, D. and Riches, S. (2007) *Business Law* (8th edn). Harlow: Pearson Education.

Kotler, P., Armstrong, G., Wong, V. and Saunders, J. (2008) *Principles of Marketing* (5th edn). Harlow: Pearson Education.

Kozier, B., Erb, G., Berman, A., Snyder, S., Lake, R. and Harvey, S. (2008) *Fundamentals of Nursing: Concepts, Process and Practice*. Harlow: Pearson Education.

Martin, G.N., Carlson, N.R. and Buskist, W. (2007) *Psychology* (3rd edn). Harlow: Pearson Education.

McLaney, E. and Atrill, P. (2008) *Accounting: An Introduction* (4th edn). Harlow: Pearson Education.

Slack, N., Chambers, S. and Johnston, R. (2007) *Operations Management* (5th edn) Harlow: Pearson Education.

Wilson, K., Ruch, G., Lymbery, M. and Cooper, A. (2008) *Social Work: An Introduction to Contemporary Practice*. Harlow: Pearson Education.

**Note:** When we have used or adapted extracts from these books, the references have been highlighted in a specific way, for example:

(Brassington and Pettitt, 2006: 343)

## Reference

Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.-C. (1994) 'Introduction: Language and the relationship to language in the teaching situation', in P. Bourdieu, J.-C. Passeron and M. de Saint Martin (eds) pp. 1–34, *Academic Discourse*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

## Frequently asked questions

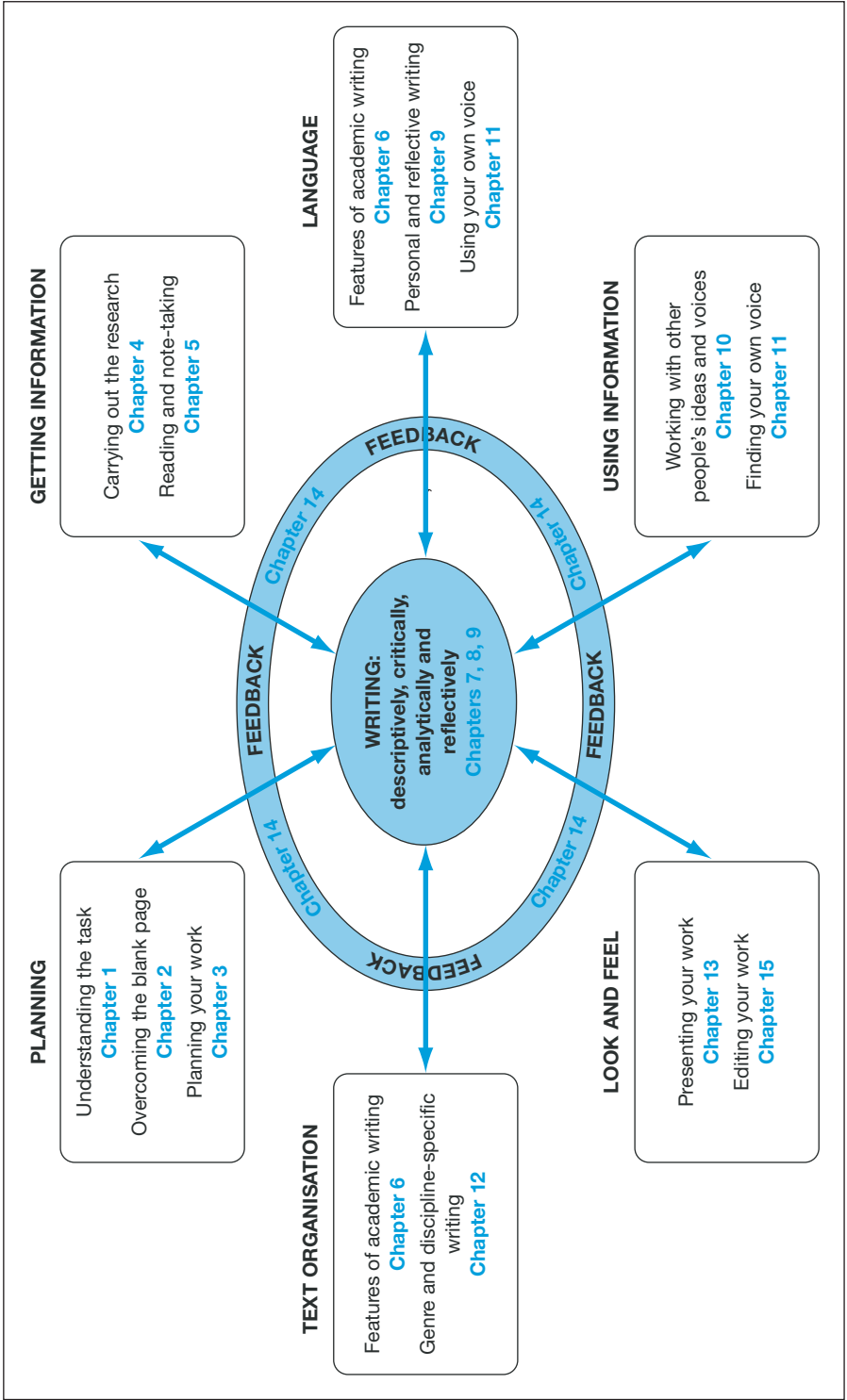
Questions	Advice	Key chapters
<b>Reading</b>		
How do I find sources?	Libraries, assignment briefs, internet, keyword searches.	Chapter 4
How do I know the sources are relevant?	Evaluate them.	Chapter 4
Why do I need sources?	To give weight to your arguments.	Chapter 10
What should I do with sources?	Read and make notes from them. Use them in your writing.	Chapters 5 and 10
What should I read?	Textbooks, journal articles and items suggested on your reading list.	Chapter 5
How should I read effectively?	Read efficiently, critically, interactively and purposefully.	Chapter 5
How much should I read?	This will depend on your plan.	Chapter 2
<b>Planning</b>		
How do I know what I have to do?	You need to understand the genre. Read the assignment brief thoroughly.	Chapter 1 Chapter 3
Where do I begin?	Deconstruct the title.	Chapter 2
How do I plan my time?	Use the charts provided to help you.	Chapter 3
How do I plan my writing?	Make sure you have covered all the vital areas before you start planning.	Chapter 6
How can I plan to improve the standard of my writing?	Check lecturers' feedback from previous assignments.	Chapter 14



Questions	Advice	Key chapters
<b>Text organisation</b>		
How do I structure my writing?	This will depend on the genre you are writing.	Chapter 12
How do I organise my ideas?	Match relevant ideas from your notes to your plan. Develop each main idea into a paragraph.	Chapter 6
How do I develop my paragraphs?	Start with a topic sentence and build on that.	Chapter 6
How do I link my paragraphs?	Use signalling words and phrases to connect them.	Chapter 6
<b>Writing</b>		
How do I write a report?	This has to be written following a very clear structure.	Chapters 1 and 12
How do I write an essay?	There are many kinds of essays but they have a common format.	Chapters 1 and 12
What does being critical mean?	It means you need to analyse and evaluate sources, and then use them to support your points.	Chapter 8
How do I write descriptively?	You need to define, categorise and classify a topic.	Chapter 7
What does being analytical mean?	It means you examine and break information into parts.	Chapter 8
What does being reflective mean?	It means you analyse actions or events and consider consequences.	Chapter 9
<b>Language</b>		
What is academic language?	It is language which is formal, objective and cautious.	Chapters 6 and 11

How can I express my opinion in my writing?	By looking at our suggested words and phrases.	Chapter 11
When can I use 'I'?	When you are writing reflectively.	Chapter 9
<b>Using sources</b>		
How do I use the ideas I find in the sources?	You can summarise, synthesise and acknowledge the sources. Your own voice must also come through.	Chapter 10 Chapter 11
How do I refer to authors I use in my writing?	You can either cite the author(s) or quote from their work.	Chapter 10
How do I avoid over-quoting?	Use a summary or paraphrase instead. Use quotations as evidence to support your own points.	Chapter 10
How do I write a reference list?	You need to follow a set format and give full information on the source.	Chapter 10
<b>Look and feel</b>		
How can I make my work look good?	Make use of white space and page layout; order and number your pages; use an appropriate font.	Chapters 13 and 15
What must I check before I hand the work in?	Check for structure, relevance, communication, bias, economy, ownership and referencing.	Chapter 15
Why is layout important?	It helps clarify meaning and it creates an impression of professionalism.	Chapter 13

Finding your way around the book



# 1

# UNDERSTANDING THE TASK

This chapter touches on many of the major features of the book but does not address them in detail. Instead it looks forward and gives you an idea of what to find in the rest of the book. It will explain how academic writing is different from other forms of writing as well as present various styles of academic writing, or genres, across a range of disciplines.

This chapter will cover:

- common reasons for why we write
- how academic writing differs from other forms of writing
- the basic structures of an essay and a report
- different disciplines and their favoured forms.

## USING THIS CHAPTER

If you want to dip into this section	Page	If you want to try the activities	Page
Introduction	2	1.1 Your subjects of study	5
Academic writing	2	1.2 Understanding learning outcomes	6
Genres of writing	5	1.3 Understanding the assessment criteria	7
Learning outcomes and assessment criteria	6		
The assignment title	7		
Basic structures	7		
Other types of academic writing	9		
Summary	11		

# INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the main ways that human beings communicate: it is a social practice. The reasons for and purpose of any piece of writing will vary, depending upon situations, relationships and events. Sometimes people write purely for themselves, for example to record their thoughts and events in a diary or to remind themselves of things they have to do. Some people write poetry or short stories, perhaps with a view to being published but also to express their ideas and inner thoughts. Sometimes the communication is a two-way process, for example an exchange of emails leads to a business transaction. At other times the communication is only one way – a letter goes unanswered or is never received by the person it is intended for.

It would not take long to think of 10 different kinds of writing that most people produce in a year: they write letters, emails and text messages; they write instructions and requests; they send invitations and fill in forms; they scribble down recipes they hear on the radio; they send cards to friends and relatives. In one sense, academic writing is just another form of writing, another way of communicating with fellow human beings. But it has certain qualities that mark it out and make it quite different from the rest of writing.

# ACADEMIC WRITING

One of the main ways that academic writing is different from other forms of writing is in its relationship with its audience – that is to say the reader. For most students that reader is one of their lecturers or tutors, although it could also be fellow students. Whoever it is, the reader will be concerned with whether the piece of writing has reached a certain standard and will use those standards to judge the quality of the writing. Furthermore, the judgement will be made formally, with a mark or grade and perhaps some written comments. People might make judgements privately about the quality of a letter they receive from a friend or business associate but there is no need or expectation that they will record their verdict.

The judgements that are made about a piece of academic writing are part of the whole process of deciding upon the quality of a person's learning and, in turn, the class of degree they should be awarded at the end of their studies. The standards that are used to form those judgements may be expressed in different ways according to the subject of study or institution but they will always be concerned with structure, clarity and accuracy. There will also be an expectation that the writing will demonstrate an objective approach and explore the subject matter thoroughly, resulting in a careful analysis.

Whatever your level of study it is important to be critical when you write an academic piece of work. This does not mean finding fault with something, as it can mean in everyday life. In the context of academic writing being critical includes:

➔  
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Chapter 8

- showing an understanding and knowledge of theory
- demonstrating an awareness of what has been written or said about the subject
- taking into consideration different points of view
- using reason to make a judgement
- not accepting ideas until they have been examined closely (and then maybe rejecting them)
- coming to your own conclusions
- using your own voice.

You might think this looks like a tall order, but hopefully there is nothing in the list that you would disagree with. The same approach is used in reading an academic text, where you need to:

➔  
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Chapter 5

- identify the line of reasoning or argument
- look for hidden assumptions
- decide if the evidence used to support the argument is good enough.

A useful framework to think about academic writing can be found in a theory about the process of learning and study called Bloom's (1956) Taxonomy of Learning. It presents six stages that a learner goes through, each one becoming more complex and building on the last. Starting with the simple mastery and recall of facts (*Knowledge*) the learner moves through rephrasing, applying and breaking down that knowledge before finally being able to manipulate and evaluate it (*Synthesis* and *Evaluation*). The taxonomy is often used to write instruction words in essay titles, so knowing something about it can help you understand what lecturers expect to see in your writing. However you also need to get familiar with the particular characteristics of your discipline.

### BLOOM'S TAXONOMY – WHAT THE LEVELS MEAN

- 1 **Knowledge** – the recall of facts
- 2 **Comprehension** – rephrasing what has been understood
- 3 **Application** – applying new knowledge to a situation
- 4 **Analysis** – breaking information down
- 5 **Synthesis** – putting the parts together to create meaning
- 6 **Evaluation** – deciding on the worth of something

How are these terms useful when you are trying to understand the task you have been given? They can be translated into essay titles as follows.

#### Sample titles for essays about the World Wide Web

- **Knowledge** – *Describe the history of the World Wide Web.*  
A simple account is required, tracing a timeline and detailing facts.
- **Comprehension** – *What effect has the World Wide Web had on the way people communicate?*  
The writer needs to show an understanding of cause and effect in this answer.
- **Application** – *Explain how the World Wide Web works.*  
The writer must use knowledge of the system to demonstrate how it works in practice.



## 1 Understanding the task

- **Analysis** – *How have methods of communication changed since the development of the World Wide Web?*  
Comparisons must be drawn, methods must be defined and examined in detail.
- **Synthesis** – *How could the World Wide Web be used to develop new ways of learning?*  
This essay calls for the writer to bring together ideas to create fresh understanding.
- **Evaluation** – *Comment on the value of the World Wide Web for society.*  
The writer must stand back from the subject and make a judgement.

## Disciplines and their differences

Academic subjects are classified into different disciplines that have evolved over time and have their own traditions and conventions. Generally speaking, a discipline is a broad area into which certain subjects are slotted. For example History is classified as a Humanities discipline, and Business as a Social Sciences discipline. Each discipline has its own approach to academic study, its own discourse and its own favoured ways of writing about its subject. A very basic division of the disciplines (<http://www.intute.ac.uk>) puts them into four main areas:

- Arts and Humanities
- Science, Engineering and Technology
- Health and Life Sciences
- Social Sciences.

While this is not a universally recognised way of dividing up subjects, it is a useful way of thinking about the differences between them, and this chapter will use it as a model for discussion.

### Arts and Humanities

This category includes subjects that relate to the cultural life of people and society, foregrounding interpretation and expression of events and ideas. Visual and creative subjects such as Music or Architecture fall into this area along with, for example:

- Literature
- Philosophy
- Theology.

This discipline relies heavily on the essay, which as an extended piece of writing becomes a dissertation. Other forms you might often come across in Arts and Humanities are a critique or a book review.

### Science, Engineering and Technology

Included in this category are any subjects that study the laws and structures of the natural world, both the physical environment (e.g. Astronomy) and the built environment (e.g. Engineering). Other examples are:

➡  
See  
Chapter 4

- Physics
- Geography
- Mathematics.

You could expect a report to be very common in these disciplines, with an extended piece of writing being a project. Another example would be some form of research proposal.

### Health and Life Sciences

Subjects that study the physical condition of people, animals and the land fall into this category, so they include Medicine, Veterinary Science and Agriculture. Other examples are:

- Biology
- Zoology
- Physiotherapy.

Again a report would dominate in this area, more specifically an experimental type of report, documenting a process such as an experiment or laboratory procedure.

### Social Sciences

This final category includes subjects that relate to the way people live in and use society. Business, Law and Education come into this area as well as, for example:

- Anthropology
- Politics
- Sports Studies.

The type of report common in these disciplines would be an investigative or project report. The case study is also a frequent genre, especially in Business.

## Activity 1.1 Your subjects of study

Which of these four main areas do your current subjects of study fall into?

# GENRES OF WRITING

➔ See  
Chapter 12

Different types of academic writing are known as genres. They have distinct purposes, forms and recognised structures. Common examples are essays, reports, case studies and projects. Although certain genres seem more suited to certain disciplines than others, you could well be asked to write in any of the above genres during your study. The clue to this will be in your assignment brief, and it is worth spending time to make sure you know exactly what type of writing you have got to produce. Whatever the genre, there are certain things that are common to all. All academic writing:

## 1 Understanding the task

- uses evidence to support the points it makes
- uses structure and order to guide the reader through the writing
- contains references for anyone else's ideas or work used.

# LEARNING OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Two things you always need to check whenever you are given an assignment brief are:

- what the assignment will test and measure, often called the *learning outcomes*
- how it will do this, known as the *assessment criteria*.

## Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes state what a student should learn and be able to demonstrate by studying a particular course or module. They are often written in ways that refer to understanding, knowledge, skills and abilities. Most modules or courses will have several learning outcomes and an assignment will be set to see how well you have achieved one or all of them. For example an assignment may state that it will assess:

- your *ability* to analyse an argument
- your *skills* in communicating your ideas
- your *understanding* of different concepts or theories.

## Activity 1.2 Understanding learning outcomes

Find one of your assignments and check what it says it will be testing. Do you understand all the terminology?

## Assessment criteria

Any assignment should include information on how your work will be judged and where marks will be awarded. For example you may be marked on:

- the quality of your explanation and analysis
- your style
- your use of theory
- the scope of your research.

The assessment criteria might be a series of statements or benchmarks that describe the different levels of achievement and explain the range of marks each level falls into. Alternatively, it may be a tick list or grid that classifies the piece of

work. Whatever form they take, assessment criteria need to be transparent and clearly understood, so that you know in advance how your work will be judged and can keep this information at the front of your mind as you write. For example, if you know that 10 per cent of the marks are reserved for references and you forget to include any, you will miss out on those marks.

### Activity 1.3 Understanding the assessment criteria

Find one of your assignments and look at how it says you will be tested. How are the marks divided?

## THE ASSIGNMENT TITLE

One thing in the assignment title that you have to be very careful about is any ‘instruction’ words. They provide a clue to the approach you should adopt. Look at the examples of instruction words and an explanation of their meanings shown in Table 1.1.

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Chapter 2

**Table 1.1** Examples of instruction words and their meanings

Word	Definition
Analyse	Consider all the relevant factors and answer in a methodical and logical way.
Compare	Discuss the similarities and differences. Write a balanced (fair, objective) answer.
Criticise	Point out the strengths and weaknesses. Write a balanced answer.
Discuss	Give both points of an argument, with implications, before reaching a conclusion.
Explain	Give detailed reasons for a situation.
Outline	Give the main points in a concise manner. Leave out details.
Summarise	Give the main points in a concise manner. Leave out details.

Failure to write in this way (e.g. comparing, explaining, describing) will result in loss of marks as *you will not have answered the question or met your tutor's expectations*.

## BASIC STRUCTURES

Structure is of major importance in a piece of academic writing and is one of the key ways that it differs from other forms of writing. There is an expectation that the

## 1 Understanding the task

writing will take the reader through the different stages or sections of the work, including clear signposts along the way. Assessment criteria will almost always include how well a piece of work has been structured. An assignment brief may give you advice on this and you should follow it carefully.

Although different disciplines will rely on and prefer different types of writing, there are two that are common to almost all: the essay and the report. It is worth understanding and knowing the accepted structure of each.

## Essay

The essay has been described as ‘the default genre’ (Andrews, 2003) and as such cuts across all disciplines. It is used to ask you to discuss and explore something in depth – for example the reasons for a particular event in history, the advantages and disadvantages of a theory, the impact of a new law on society. It will usually expect you to indicate your point of view or judgement on the topic.

Usually you will be given an essay title to answer, with an instruction word to give you an idea of the angle you should take in your essay. It is usually the first word, as in the following examples:

**Discuss** the following question: why are comparatively few older people the subjects of fictional coverage in television drama?

(Wilson *et al.*, 2008: 651)

**Explain** how criminal cases are allocated for trial between magistrates’ courts and the Crown Court.

(Keenan and Riches, 2007: 71)

**Outline** the powers available to protect consumers.

(Keenan and Riches, 2007: 430)

## Typical essay structure

An essay normally follows this structure:

➔  
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- 1 Introduction
- 2 Development
- 3 Conclusion
- 4 References.

➔  
See  
Chapter 6

The four areas play very different parts. The *Introduction* acts as a way in to the main section, providing some background information on the topic and explaining which particular aspects of it will be covered in the essay. It is normally one or two paragraphs long. The *Development* section builds up the writer’s main ideas in a series of paragraphs. These paragraphs must be linked to one another so that anyone reading the essay can follow the line of argument and thread of the discussion. The *Conclusion* draws together the main point of each of the paragraphs and can include a statement on the opinion of the writer. Finally the *References* section gives

full details of any sources (books, journals, websites, etc.) that have been mentioned, cited or quoted in the essay.

**TIP** *Most exam questions call for an essay in a shorter form, so you can use the model structure to answer an exam question as well.*

## Report

A report is usually the result of some kind of investigation of a situation, event or series of events. It is very common to working life so if you become familiar with its structure and use it well you will find you are developing an important skill for future employment. Some common examples of reports are:

- a market research report, explaining trends and consumer behaviour
- an annual report from a company, documenting performance
- a survey report, presenting findings on opinions, preferences or behaviour.

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### Typical report structure

Unlike an essay, a report will have sections and headings to guide the reader through the document. Like an essay, it has a beginning, middle and end.

- **first part:** title page; summary; list of contents
- **middle part:** introduction; methodology; findings/results; discussion; conclusion
- **last part:** references; bibliography; appendices.

The *first* part presents your work to the audience, rather like the opening credits of a film or play. The summary (or abstract) is particularly useful here as it gives a condensed version of the entire report. The *middle* part is where the material is developed. Each section has a heading and takes the reader through the investigation, analysis and discussion. The *last* part contains all the supporting material that has been used in the report, for example any outside sources, the raw data or questionnaires, if used.

## OTHER TYPES OF ACADEMIC WRITING

Although essays and reports are generic terms, there are many other types of academic writing or genres (Gillett and Hammond, in press). Guidance is offered here on some of the most common and they are linked to the four main subject areas mentioned earlier:

- **Arts and Humanities:** essay; critique or review
- **Science, Engineering and Technology:** report; research proposal
- **Health and Life Sciences:** lab report; reflective account
- **Social Sciences:** project; case study.

## 1 Understanding the task

It is important to remember that no genre belongs exclusively to one particular discipline or subject area.

**Table 1.2 Academic writing styles**

Genre	Used for
Essay	Exploration of an issue.
Critique/review	Critical appraisal of a piece of writing.
Report	Written account of an investigation.
Research proposal	Suggestions for research.
Lab report	Write-up of an experiment.
Reflective account	Personal account of an event, experience, etc.
Project	Investigation with stages, targets and deadlines.
Case study	In-depth analysis of an organisation or situation.

➔  
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### Critique/review

A critique (or review) is used to make a judgement about a book or article. It calls upon a number of academic skills, including summary, analysis and evaluation. While it is commonly used in the Arts and Humanities it is useful for any student who has to evaluate sources as part of an assignment.

### Research proposal

A research proposal is used to put forward ideas for future research. It has to justify the proposed research, explain how the work will be done and what the research is expected to show, and include a time-frame.

### Lab report

Many science subjects will use a lab report in which a student will write up the results of an experiment, reporting findings and interpreting results. Usually, a lab report follows a set structure in which the results are presented before any analysis or discussion.

➔  
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Chapter 9

### Reflective account

It is becoming more and more common for reflective accounts to be used in all disciplines as a way of helping students develop their professional and employment skills. Reflective accounts are characterised by a personal view of events, with an explanation of how the writer reacted to and acted upon those events.