

## DEVELOPING A COURSE IN ACADEMIC WRITING FOR BUSINESS STUDENTS: CONTENT AND REASONS

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### **Abstract**

*Having developed a course in Academic Writing (in English) for the students from the Management and Business Administration Department there appears the need to explain what Academic Writing is, the reasons they have to study an academic subject, that some would say it is more suitable for students from the Department of Foreign Languages, and the importance of this course for students while they are still doing their studies at university and later on when they will become business graduates and will have to find the right job for them. The purpose of this piece of writing is to make students understand and believe in the utility of such a course both for their current good performance as students and for making a brilliant career once they possess the skills an Academic Writing course teaches them.*

**Key words:** Academic writing, content, critical thinking, student, reasons.

**Clasificare JEL:** A23

### **INTRODUCTION**

Ideally, a written text should be like a Mozart symphony. Everything fits together perfectly, and the removal of a single note, or a single sentence, would destroy the whole. In a paper, the overall objectives must be clear, the design coherent, and the individual themes linked to each other and to the whole. Paragraphs must form coherent units, linked to other paragraphs and to the big picture by well-defined topic sentences and by transitional clauses and sentences. Above all, the logic of your argument, from your largest point to the smallest detail, must be expressed with clarity and precision. The only way for business students to master these elaborate writing skills is to do a course in Academic Writing.

Before enlarging on the importance of Academic Writing for business students there appears the need to explain what exactly a course in Academic Writing should comprise. Often, people associate academic writing as inaccessible and long-winded. However, strong academic writing uses a straightforward manner to inform, persuade and analyse the subject matter. In addition to this, good academic writing allows you to engage the reader in scholarly dialogue through critical engagement. Simply put, academic writing is any written work produced in the academic setting and one that is formal. The most widely-spread forms of academic writing our business students should master include:

**Essay:** The most common type of written work, with the title given by the teacher, the length depending on the type of test or assignment.

**Report:** A description of something a student has done, for example, conducting a survey.

**Project:** A piece of research, either individual or group work with the topic chosen by the student.

**Notes:** They are a written record of the main points of a text or lecture, for a student's personal use.

**Thesis/Dissertation:** The longest piece of writing normally done by the student, often for a higher degree, on a topic chosen by the student. Here, you make an argument or support a thesis, using outside information.

**Research Paper:** In writing a research paper, you need to know how to synthesise external information with your original ideas.

There is a considerable difference between creative and academic writing as different academic disciplines have their stylistic conventions. However, the following are some of the features that most academic writing materials share:

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**Clear Primary Focus:** The thesis statement establishes the focus of the academic paper. Every argument or comment has to connect back to the primary focus of the article. The same applies to the background or contextual information that you may include.

**Arguments Based on Evidence:** Using evidence to support your arguments or those of another, makes them credible. These arguments should, therefore, be well-informed.

**Logical Structure:** Academic writing follows a consistent flow or presentation of cases. It is in the form of Introduction, Body and Conclusion. The paragraphs and sentences must connect logically. The introduction lays out the direction and scope of the paper, provides background information, and a thesis statement. The body should offer points that support the thesis statement and elaborate on them. In your conclusion, you summarise the main points.

**Formal Tone:** You need to present your ideas or arguments, objectively. Do not use inflammatory, biased or emotional language.

Having designed a special course *English for Business and Academic Purposes* for business students there appears the need to explain the students themselves the importance, utility and relevance of this course to other economic subjects, their university performance as a whole and most importantly to their prospect jobs. Writing does not come easily to many and for some students, having to write an academic paper could feel intimidating. Sometimes, you may ask yourself, whether all the effort you invest in writing an academic paper, is worth it.

Firstly, for university students, writing academic papers is compulsory. It could be in the form of reports, literature reviews, journals, term papers, dissertation, essays and research papers. For example, international students need to write essays and reports for exams, such as IELTS, TOEFL, FCE, and coursework, but writing good **academic English** is one of the most demanding tasks students face. In order to produce an outstanding document, you have to plan and develop a workable strategy. Therefore this course should be an essential part of a college's program that university teachers and schools spend weeks teaching and training students about academic writing. Whatever disciplines you are in, academic writing helps you to make arguments, convey ideas and participate in a scholarly conversation.

Secondly, Academic writing develops a set of other skills which in my view are crucial in both having high university records and making a successful career in business. During the job hunt, after graduation, you will realise that many companies are looking for potential employees with sound writing skills. However, this is not the only significant reason why it is vital to hone your academic writing skills. Other benefits doing an academic writing course are as follows:

**Academic writing helps you understand that writing is a useful skill.** Sometimes writing is perceived as an innate ability – you either have it or you not. This actually often happens in academic fields, discouraging students from developing their weak skills. The two most common subjects referred to as talents are writing and math. The truth is that math, chemistry, calculus, **academic writing** and even poetry are all skills and can be learned. The good news is that while you are made to write academic papers, you learn that: With a certain amount of patience and determination you can do the things you hate doing well – in other words, no amounts of inspiration required. With time, your writing becomes better and talent does not beat everything, especially in the academic field. In other words, academic writing teaches you to approach any activity as it is – as a skill, and, as every skill, it can be learned, nourished and developed.

**Develops analytical skills:** In academic writing, you learn to form an informed opinion by looking at the ideas and works of somebody else. It involves more than just describing their views. You read the material and then decide on its importance as a literary work to the subject. You have to think about the reason why the study was carried out, and the findings can prove useful, in the future. The research process allows you to cover a range of material on the subject. In turn, you learn how to classify and analyse the information. For example students are given the following task:

*Consider the following titles and decide which sections should be included in the essay on the topic “The Growth of the European Union since 1975 and its likely form by 2020”.*

*A short account of European history 1900-2000.*

*An analysis of candidates for membership before 2020.*

*A discussion of the current economic situation in Europe.*

*A summary of the enlargement of the EU from 1975 to now.*

Such a task makes students think analytically as they have to analyse and select the relevant information for their topic. Another aspect of academic writing - summary writing also involves selecting and besides that - condensing information. For instance if a friend asks you about a book you are reading, you do not tell her about everything in the book. Instead you make a summary of the most interesting and important aspects. Thus making summaries is a common activity in everyday life and different kinds of summaries are needed in different situations. The following tasks are clearly likely to develop the analytical skills and more: *Read the following text and compare the summaries. Decide which is best giving reasons. Or: Read the following text and underline the key points.*

**Conveys understanding:** If you struggle with academic writing, it may be difficult for you to explain a complicated subject you have learnt at university. The scholarly essays that you have to write help you learn how to use the right terminology and style that will make the information to understand by others. It also helps you to develop a reasonable flow of thoughts with full-fledged ideas. Making the students understand a text is not just a matter of vocabulary. The reader needs to find out the writer's intentions. Is the writer aiming to inform, persuade, describe or entertain? In addition the reader should be clear about the type of English the writer is using: how formal is the tone? For example the students are given such a task: *Read the following extracts and complete the table using one or two of the following: inform/amuse/persuade/entertain.*

**Encourages critical thinking and objectivity:** You also learn to look at research and ideas from different perspectives. Proficient writers will not write a paper that is one-sided that leaves no room for argument. You should analyse a theory from various viewpoints. It is what you need to base your statements on, depending on your understanding. Objectivity and critical thinking are also useful skills to master, in the real world. Also, for an educated person, constructing arguments and being able to defend your viewpoint is essential. This is an extremely useful skill for people to learn early on in life, as the ability to look at things objectively is something that will benefit them in real life. For instance students are assigned such tasks: *Read the following sentences and decide first if they are a fact or opinion. Then decide if you agree with the opinions, and if the factual sentences are true.*

	<i>Opinion or fact</i>	<i>Agree or disagree</i>	<i>True or false</i>
<i>Example: The USA has the biggest economy in the world</i>	<i>Fact</i>		<i>True</i>
<i>a) Shakespeare was a great writer</i>			
<i>b) Smoking can be dangerous</i>			
<i>c) Too many people smoke in Britain</i>			
<i>d) 95% criminal cannot read</i>			
<i>e) Poor education causes half of crime</i>			

At the same time the task could be: *Evaluate the following text in a similar way. Here the student has to do a more thorough research.*

**Cultivates discipline:** For you to write effectively, you need to have a routine and stick to it. It allows you to move a step closer to your end goal. Regular writing exercises instil discipline in you, especially when you feel exhausted or lack the motivation to write, but know that you need to do so. Always remind yourself of your target and the reason why you started. With practice, your writing skills also improve. Most of the time the students are not attached to the writing, because it is official and logic-based, and they are probably writing about a topic they also do not like very much. During this endeavour you learn that writing is hard, and can be boring and demanding – and

this will serve you later, when you push through and keep writing blog posts or practicing your presentation skills while others are waiting for inspiration to come. Guess who will win eventually?

**Makes you used to a routine:** As stated in the previous paragraph, routine helps to improve your skill. This is tough even for those who do have talent and desire to write, let alone for those who do not. Forcing yourself to do writing exercises no matter how uninspired and tired you are sounds unpleasant. To be honest, even the most dedicated writers will have to gather all their willpower to do some extra writing in their spare time, especially if the topic does not seem very appealing.

**Makes you dig to the basics:** We live in a world flooded with information, and not every piece of information we receive can be trusted. However, not every educational institution teaches their students critical thinking. This is probably why writing academic papers is so difficult for most students. We are all used to getting complete information from textbooks instead of reading the source and making our own conclusions. The students are given such a task as: *Identify the key points in the text below for your purpose. You are preparing to write an essay on the topic: Changing patterns of longevity. Or: Read the following text and then choose a tile which expresses the key point.*

**Enlarges on students' vocabulary.** Besides the skills from above Academic Writing also teaches students pure language skills. Paraphrasing is a component of Academic Writing which involves changing a text so that it is quite different from the original source, while retaining the meaning. This skill is very important in several areas of academic work such as note-making, summary writing. It is vital in academic writing to avoid the risk of plagiarism. Tasks that enlarge on the students' vocabulary are: *Find synonyms for the words in italics, Change the word class of the words in italics and then rewrite the sentences, Change the word order of the sentences (other changes may be needed.), Combine all the paraphrasing techniques to paraphrase the paragraph as fully as possible.*

After enumerating all the skills you could acquire from a course on Academic Writing it would very useful to enlarge on several ways of making this endeavour easier for students. Therefore, before working on any academic writing assignment, remember to follow the given instruction by your professor. It is the first step towards producing an academic paper that is worth securing a place among other scholarly articles. Here arises another question: How can you, as a student and not only, improve your academic writing without putting in much extra effort, but also get interested in it? The following are some suggestions for students about how they can improve their academic writing skills and raise interest in writing.

*Subscribe to a scientific blog:* This does not sound like the best way to spend an evening, but it can be very helpful. The one thing you should note is that you need to spend some time finding a scientific field that really interests you, or else you will not be able to keep you motivation at a level needed to click on the book mark and check the blog. This is a form of passive education – the more good academic writing you read, the better you become at it, and the easier it is for you to understand those scientific articles.

*Talk to someone who likes science:* This way you will be able to find a friend fascinated by black holes, but much harder is to find one who actually knows something about them. People who know a lot in their scientific field and genuinely enjoy it are usually able to explain the most difficult concepts in a simple way, and therefore draw attention to the topic. Moreover, the more concepts you understand, the easier you navigate the realm of human intellectuality. In other words, reading fancy- academic articles will become easier for you gradually.

*Reread your papers once in a while:* Rereading your old writing is very much like looking at your old profile photos – it can be fun and educating, but most of the time it is embarrassing. However, it performs the same important function of teaching you on your own mistakes, just as your old photos teach you that having bangs is not a suitable haircut for you in any scenario, period. Also make sure you leave yourself some room to be proud of the work you have done – this will

help increase the motivation levels and make you eager to improve your writing even more. Once you encounter a paper you like, do not forget to reward yourself for it. Positive reinforcement still works rather well.

## CONCLUSION

All the skills an Academic Writing course can develop will help students to earn good grades and high level degrees. Beyond education, the skills they learn writing academic papers will be carried with the student into any future employment they may have. Being able to present your ideas clearly and logically in writing is a powerful tool in the business world. Therefore, I would like to ask the students: *What do you think about Academic Writing and its application in real life now? When your professor says you will need it later in life, will you believe that he or she is not lying to force you to do “unnecessary work”?* So, when you have an academic writing exercise, take it as an opportunity to develop your skills, and not just in writing. Though your writing skills may be wanting, with practice, you will even surprise yourself with how much you have improved.

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