UNSW Australia

O-Week 2015

Developing your Academic Writing

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The Learning Centre
Aims

To look at techniques to make your academic writing:

- Clearer, more focused and persuasive
- More appropriate in structure and language
Overview

- Features of academic writing
- Writing in your discipline
- Paragraph structure
- Developing your writing
  - Cohesion
  - Nominalization
- Voice in academic writing
Academic writing is:
- Well focused and structured
- Critical
- Reasoned
- Based on evidence
- Clearly written
- More formal tone
- Non-discriminatory
Writing in *your* discipline

Is there a characteristic style of writing?

- How are texts structured?
- How is language used?
**Identifying writing practices**

1. **Find a good example** of the type of writing you have to do, such as an essay or report. Ask your tutor for a good model, or for references to well-written articles or books.

2. **Spend an hour** each week reading with a focus on *how* the writer discusses the content, not *what* s/he says.

3. **Select one aspect** to focus on: the language, style, structure or treatment of information.
Linguistic features

- Is there a typical terminology?
- How do writers talk about particular methods or procedures? How do they discuss findings?
- Is the first person / used? How?
Paragraph

- is a basic unit of writing.
- develops one main point, or part of a larger point.
- Consists of:
  - topic sentence
  - Supporting sentences
  - Conclusion or ‘wrap’ sentence
Topic sentence

- States the main point
- Develops the argument in an essay
- Is in the writer’s voice; (don't include a quotation or begin with reference to another author).
- Is usually the first sentence
Supporting sentences

- includes elaboration of the main point, reasoning, analysis and evidence

- All sentences relate to the main point.
Conclusion or ‘wrap’ sentence

- closing sentence of the paragraph – can make an evaluation or indicate the significance of the point of the paragraph.

- not a simple summary of the content of the paragraph

- can also link to the next paragraph.

(Adapted from Dunleavy, 2003)
Q: “Definitions of pornography are disputed.” Discuss

Original
Definitions are also often compromises between what the definer thinks and what they think they should think. They may often feel obliged to conform to a mythical community standard. They also reflect the times in which they are written. Many Victorian works of art, for example, were once considered pornographic. (Ian Collinson, TLC, UNSW)
Definitions of pornography are subject to negotiation and change. Definitions are also often compromises between what the definer thinks and what they think they should think. They may often feel obliged to conform to a mythical community standard. They also reflect the times in which they are written. Many Victorian works of art, for example, were once considered pornographic. Any discussion of pornography must account for such modifications.
Academic style and vocabulary

- Definitions are often compromises between individual and social standards. Individuals may often feel obliged to conform to a mythical community standard. Definitions also reflect the historical and social context in which they are formulated. Many Victorian works of art, for example, were once considered pornographic.
Definitions are also often compromises between what the definer thinks and what they think they should think. They may often feel obliged to conform to a mythical community standard. Some critics have argued that they are static and universal. In contrast, I would suggest that they reflect the times in which they are written. Many Victorian works of art, for example, were once considered pornographic.
Offering support: evidence & citation

Definitions are also often compromises between what the definer thinks and what they think they should think. They may often feel obliged to conform to ‘a mythical community standard’ (Garcia 1999, p.8). They reflect the times in which they are written. For example, as Thomas argues, many Victorian works of art were once considered pornographic (1979, p.376).
Definitions of pornography are subject to negotiation and change. Definitions are often compromises between individual and social standards. Individuals may often feel obliged to conform to a mythical community standard (Garcia 1999, p.8). Some critics have argued that they are static and universal (Fitzsimmons 1999; Friedman 2001). In contrast, I would suggest that definitions reflect the historical and social context in which they are formulated. For example, as Thomas argues, many Victorian works of art were once considered pornographic (1979, p.376). Any discussion of pornography must account for such modifications. (Ian Collinson, TLC, UNSW)
Cohesion

- Refers to how all the different elements of a paragraph are smoothly woven together.

- Is achieved in different ways such as using:
  - Transition signals
  - parallelism
Transition signals

- Link sentences to each other and thus help your writing flow smoothly.
- Make the relationship between the sentences clear (e.g. cause/effect) and help to make the meaning clear.
- Are usually set off by a comma.

http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/onlib/trans1.html
Parallelism

- Parallelism is the use of similar grammatical structures for similar elements of meaning in a sentence or among sentences. E.g.:

  Spoken and written language vary depending on the relationships between the people involved, the purpose of their communication, and the context in which it takes place.
Parallelism

- Is the use of similar grammatical structures for similar elements of meaning in a sentence or among sentences. E.g.:

*Spoken and written language vary depending on the relationships between the people involved, the purpose of their communication, and the context in which it takes place.*
What does parallelism do?

- Parallelism makes clear the relationship between different parts of a sentence, so that the meaning is more easily understood.

- The underlying principle is that the form reflects the meaning.
Parallelism is useful for:

For comparing and contrasting:

- e.g. There are two ways to think about such events. The first considers the social impact, the second examines the implications for individuals.

- For lists, outlines, or headings:
  
  - e.g. There are three approaches to the question:
    - social
    - psychological
    - physical
Complete the following sentence using the information below:

The candidates in the election talked about:

- What they were going to do about climate change
- The need for improvement in high school education
- People complaining about the health system
The candidates in the election talked about their plans for action on climate change, the need for improvement in high school education and the complaints about the health system.
Achieving a strong writer’s voice

- Writing about your writing (meta-discourse).
- Use of *I*
- Citation pattern
- Topic sentences
- Theme/rheme
- Use of modal expressions
Writer’s voice 1: Writing about your writing (meta-discourse)

- This essay first explores the key factors leading to …. It then contrasts X and Y…
- As mentioned above…
- As discussed below…
- Transition signals
Writer’s voice 2: Use of first person

- Depends on disciplinary convention
  Check what this is in your School/Faculty

- Use when writing about the organization of the text:
  *In this essay I argue that…. I first…. I then…*
Consider how much prominence you want to give to your sources.

- **Idea prominent**: The concept of poverty has been the focus of intensive research in many countries (Ravaillon, 1996).

- **Author prominent**: Ravaillon (1996) notes that the concept of poverty has been the focus of intensive research in many countries. (adapted from Saunders, 2003).
### Whose voice? (Ridley, 2008, p.141)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who’s responsible?</th>
<th>Textual voice</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>Central</td>
<td>Absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global warming is a serious risk to the planet.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared</td>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>Subordinate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global warming is a serious risk to the planet (Clark 2006).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared</td>
<td>Corresponding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As Clark (2006) point out, global warming is a ..</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared</td>
<td>Subordinate</td>
<td>Dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark (2006) points out that global warming is a ..</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Delayed</td>
<td>Central</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Writer’s voice 4: topic sentence

- States the main point
- Develops the argument in an essay
- Is in the writer’s voice; (don’t include a quotation or begin with reference to another author).
- Is usually the first sentence
Writer’s voice 5: Theme/rheme

Theme: the words and phrases at the beginning of a clause.

Rheme: everything thing else in the clause, including the verb.

Wider reading develops understanding of a particular topic.

Understanding of a particular topic develops with wider reading.

(adapted from B. Kamler and P. Thomson, 2006)
Modality indicates whether a speaker thinks that a statement is:
- Certain, probable or possible, or
- Advisable or obligatory

Modality is expressed by:
- modal verbs such as may, might, should, could etc
- verbs such as suggests, indicates, tends
- words such as possibly, probably, likely.
# Making claims

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weaker</th>
<th>may result in</th>
<th>will result in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Might result in</td>
<td>it is very likely that</td>
<td>it is certain that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is possible that</td>
<td>seems to have</td>
<td>has</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would seem to have</td>
<td>seems to have</td>
<td>has</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May have/</td>
<td>contributed to</td>
<td>caused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggests</td>
<td>indicates</td>
<td>shows</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Paltridge & Starfield, 2007)
Nominalization
(changing verb into noun)

Nominalization is useful for:
- Condensing information into one word
- Dealing with abstract ideas

E.g.
When you compare the two texts you will see that the earlier text was written in a more conversational style.

A comparison of the two essays indicates that the earlier text was written in a more conversational style.
Passive voice

can be used when:

- the agent is not known, or it is not necessary to identify the agent: eg.
  - *Barack Obama was elected president of the US in 2008.*

- the focus is on issues not individual people: eg.
  - *Care must be taken to avoid plagiarism*

- the writer does not want to use a personal tone: eg.
  - *Reading is seen as a shared process...*
For Orientation Week ppt slides:

gettingstarted.unsw.edu.au/orientation
References


What does the LC do?

- Provides academic support services to all UNSW students
- Offers learning and language assistance programs
What kind of assistance is available at the LC?

- Workshops in academic skills
- Individual consultations
- Faculty or discipline-based programs
- Academic skills resources online
- Self-access resources at the LC

*Services provided free to all enrolled students, undergraduate and postgraduate.*
Contact the LC

- http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/
- Lower Ground Floor, North Wing, Chancellery Building Map reference C22
- **Phone:** 02 9385 2060
- **Opening Hours**
  - Monday to Thursday: 9 am - 5 pm
  - Friday: 9 am - 2.30 pm