

DKE Masters

Advanced Academic Writing: Aspects of Readability



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Academic writing

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What does the concept 'academic writing' mean?



"When writing your essays, I encourage you to think for yourselves while you express what I'd most agree with."

What does “academic writing” mean?

- Writing in academic studies: papers, essays, reports, theses, reviews, etc.
- Audience: specialist and professional (from novice to expert)
- Adherence to norms and standards of academic community

Academic writing

- Grounded in evidence: what people have written before
 - you build on literature of others - hence you cite all your sources
- Vested in style: formal language
 - you adhere to the accepted forms of the discipline (e.g. information order, choice of vocabulary and syntactic structures)

Processes in writing

PEANUTS

by Schulz



Processes in writing

- Define a “problem”
- Draft a structure
- Search for relevant literature and analyse the information
- Synthesize literature findings with your “problem”
- Write a first version
- Revise your text, make adjustments and edit the text carefully
- Final version

Overview of Lecture

- Structure and organisation
- Paragraph structure, coherence, cohesion and metadiscourse
- Conciseness and precision
- Reporting sources
- Plagiarism and other ethical issues

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Structure and Organisation

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What makes texts easy to read?

- Overall structure
- Paragraphs
- Organisation of information
- Conciseness
- Lexical precision

Why do texts need to be easy to read?

- Academic duty/responsibility
- Attract the reader

Structure of a paper



Introductions

- What should an introduction include?

Introductions

- What should an introduction include?
 - Background and context

Introductions

- What should an introduction include?
 - Background and context
 - A clear problem question

Introductions

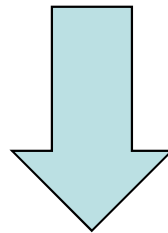
- What should an introduction include?
 - Background and context
 - A clear problem question
 - A brief outline of the layout of the paper

Academic Paragraphs



Academic Paragraphs

1. Organised around one central point (unified)
2. Each sentence is linked with the next and there is a flow of ideas



3. It will be coherent and the reader will understand.

Paragraphs

Task 1 (10 minutes)

(Term paper, Pranay Sethi, UMich
Knowledge Engineering Student)

- Consider the visual features of the paper. What stands out?

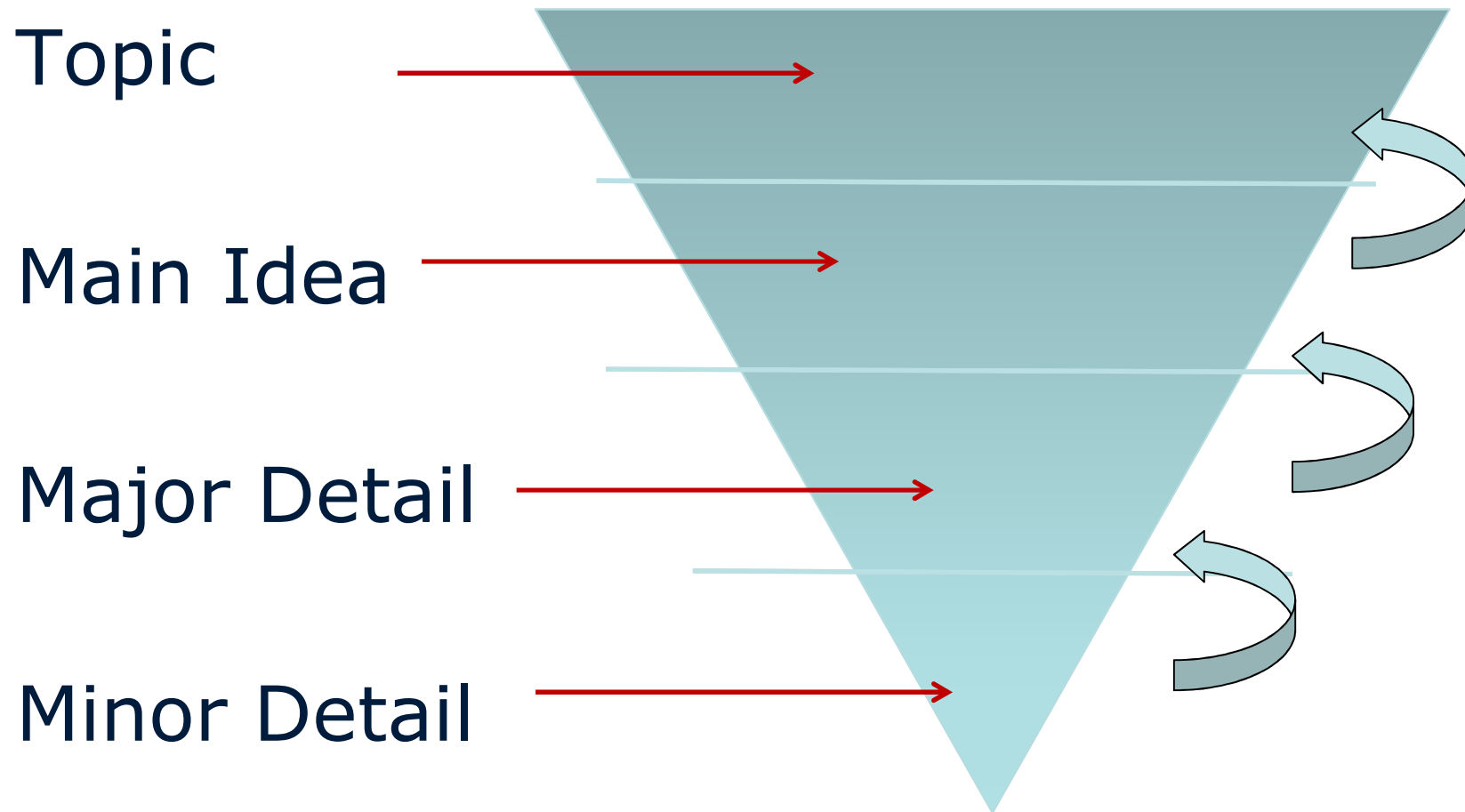
Paragraphs

Now look at the paper by Winter et al. How does it compare? Which looks more academic? Why?

Constructing a Paragraph

- 3 sections of a paragraph
 - Topic sentence
 - Elaboration (explanation of methods, findings, pros, cons)
 - Wrap-up sentence (for longer paragraphs)
- Unified: one topic
- Coherent: internally and externally
- Length

An academic paragraph



Paragraphs

Omit:

- Non-existent paragraphs
 - One sentence does not equal one paragraph.
- Short, choppy sentences
- Repetition
- Very long sentences: difficult to control grammar and punctuation

Conclusions

- What is included in a good conclusion?



Conclusions

- What is included in a good conclusion?
 - Refer back to the title and purpose statement
 - A summary of the argument
 - Recognition of the limitations of the paper
 - Recommendations for future research

Metadiscourse

What is Metadiscourse?



Metadiscourse

- When the writer explicitly helps the reader through the text as it evolves.
 - Reveals the organisation of the paper
 - Draws attention to tables/figures and items of importance/interest
 - Highlights prior knowledge needed or gives definitions

Metadiscourse

- Why?
 - Reduces cognitive load for reader
 - Aids communication
 - Establishes relationship with audience
 - Highlights important information
 - Helps support a position

Metadiscourse

- Where?
 - At the end of the introduction
 - At the beginning/end of sections
 - At the beginning of the conclusion
- How much?
 - Depends on length of paper and complexity of information
 - More in literature reviews and theses

Metadiscourse

Task 2 (5 minutes)

- Think about the paper you will write for this course. Discuss with a colleague what metadiscourse features you could include. Where will you include them? Note your conclusions in order to apply them in your writing assignment.

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Conciseness and Precision

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Be concise, precise & direct (3)



Be concise, precise & direct (3)

Say only what needs to be said.

Make every word count.

Be concise, precise & direct

Task 3 (10 minutes)

- Work with a colleague to make the following sentences more concise without omitting important information.

Task 3 (1)

To all intents and purposes, industrial productivity generally depends on certain factors that are really more psychological in nature than of any given technological aspects. **25**

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To all intents and purposes, industrial productivity generally depends on certain factors that are really more psychological in nature than of any given technological aspects. **25**

Industrial productivity depends more on psychological than on technological factors. **10**

Task 3 (2)

Basically, the failure of the research to investigate the underlying reasons for depression among male and female students is one of its major drawbacks. **24**

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Basically, the failure of the research to investigate the underlying reasons for depression among male and female students is one of its major drawbacks. **24**

The research's failure to investigate the reasons for depression among students is a drawback. **14**

Task 3 (3)

However, the research, which was undertaken by Webb, reflected her interest in the subject of childhood resilience. **17**

Task 3 (3)

However, the research, which was undertaken by Webb, reflected her interest in the subject of childhood resilience. **17**

However, Webb's research reflected her interest in childhood resilience. **9**

Task 3 (4)

It was Robertson and Foster who proposed a new control model which was opposed by Miller. **16**

Task 3 (4)

It was Robertson and Foster who proposed a new control model which was opposed by Miller. **16**

Miller opposed Robertson and Foster's new control model. **8**

Conciseness: Strategies (1)

- Omit unnecessary modifiers and determiners, e.g. adjectives/adverbs that don't add meaning to a sentence.
 - quite, really, rather, very, definitely, individual, specific, particular, definitely, actually
 - Indeed!!!!!!

Conciseness: strategies (2)

- Omit repetition
 - E.g. redundant pairs/categories:
A total of 68 participants, Small in size,
Period in time, Summarize briefly...
Past memories, each individual, future
plans, end result, past history, in a
confused state, unusual in nature,
extreme in degree.....

Conciseness (3)

Phrases → single words

It is possible that...
There is a chance that...
It could happen that...
The possibility exists for...

=?

Conciseness (3)

It is possible that...
There is a chance that...
It could happen that...
The possibility exists for...

May
Might
Could

Conciseness: Strategies (4)

- Use strong verbs, not nouns:
Make an adjustment → adjust
Perform an analysis → analyse
Make a judgment → judge

Conciseness: strategies (5)

- Who/that/which clauses → phrases:
The procedure that is most efficient and accurate.
→ The most efficient and accurate procedure.

Conciseness: Strategies (6)

- **Where possible**, make passive sentences active.
 - Shorter, clearer and more direct:
The data was analysed by the research team.
→ The research team analysed the data.

Conciseness: Strategies (7)

- Avoid using expletives at the beginning of sentences.
- It + 'be' / There + 'be'
 - There are four rules that should be observed. (8)
 - Four rules should be observed. (5)

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Reporting Sources

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Referencing

- Use APA style for citations and references
- Do not use newspaper articles as sources
- Do not use footnotes

Referencing: Reports / Communications

First position	Second position	Third position	Fourth position	Fifth position	Sixth position	Seventh position

Referencing: Reports / Communications

First position	Second position	Third position	Fourth position	Fifth position	Sixth position	Seventh position
Author or Name of organisation	Year of publication	Title of document	Place of publication	Publisher (if not the same as 1) – in this case it's the same.	Retrieval date (European or US order – but keep to one form; always use month in words)	Web reference (6 th edition of APA does not prescribe the full web address anymore; sufficient to be able to locate the document archive is enough).

Referencing: Books

First position	Second position	Third position	Fourth position	Fifth position	Sixth position

Referencing: Books

First position	Second position	Third position	Fourth position	Fifth position	Sixth position
Name of author + initials	Year of publication	Title of book	Edition (if relevant)	Place of publication	Publisher

Referencing: Journals

First position	Second position	Third position	Fourth position	Fifth position	Sixth position	Seventh position

Referencing: Journals

First position	Second position	Third position	Fourth position	Fifth position	Sixth position	Seventh position
Name of author + initials	Year of publication	Title of document (article)	Name of journal	Volume no. of journal	Page numbers of article	DOI number [or {retrieval date followed by} website]

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Copying and Plagiarism

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Copying and plagiarism

- Citation:
 - the process of giving due credit to the sources of facts, opinions and ideas that you refer to in your writing
 - always cite the source you *use*
 - avoid secondary sources



Copying and plagiarism

- Plagiarism is the deliberate or unintentional reporting of facts, opinions, ideas, etc., as though they were your own
 - academic knowledge is shared, objective knowledge, but it is the *intellectual property* of the author
 - authors' professional careers depend on their academic knowledge, as will yours - don't throw it away

The New York Times

September 9, 2003

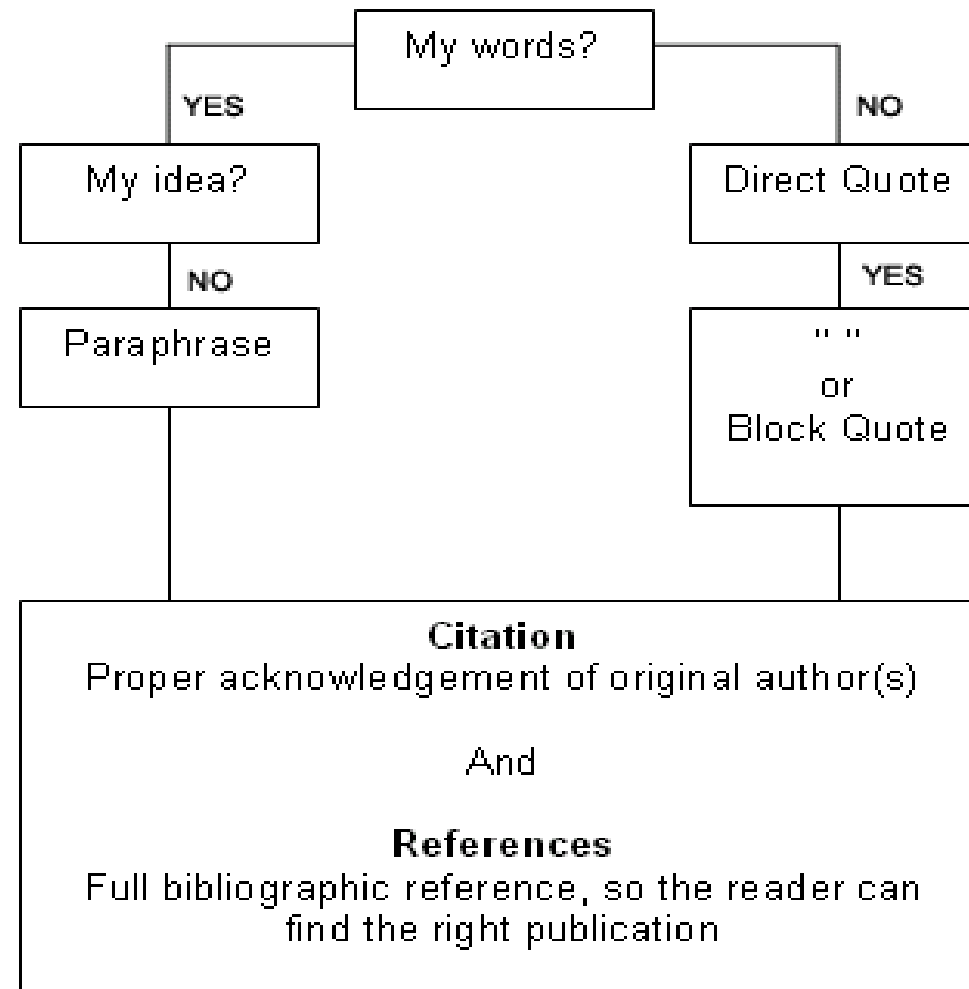


Barry Fitzgerald

Why cite your sources?

- You demonstrate your understanding of what you have learned (i.e. you show your relative expertise)
- You enable readers to retrieve sources for research or other purposes
- You avoid being charged with plagiarism

Citing sources



Assignment

- Write a paper of about 1800 words concerning your research project contributions.
 - Use LaTeX publishing environment only.
 - Submission deadline: 12.00 December 3rd 2014.
 - Expected date of feedback: Tuesday 13th January 2015.
 - Send to DKE-workshops@maastrichtuniversity.nl

Assignment

- Format Requirements
 - Cover page clearly stating the title, your name, student number, course, course tutor name and date.
 - Use headings and sub-headings.
 - All text should be justified.
 - Leave one line of space in between each new paragraph.
 - Do not indent new paragraphs.

Further help

- Academic Writing Skills manual
– available on EleUM
- <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource>
- <http://corpus.byu.edu/bnc/> and <http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/> for vocabulary and collocation assistance

Summary

Readability found at every level:

Overall structure

Paragraph

(coherence, metadiscourse, organisation)

Sentences

(concise)

Vocabulary

(precise)

Good luck

