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How to develop English for academic writing in your units and courses

Can you spend regular time each week on English language study? Just thirty minutes to one hour per week can be enough for continuous development. This handout suggests how you can use the things you already have to read for classes and assignments to help you develop your academic writing skills in English.

STEP 1: INPUT

Input means listening and reading examples of the type of language you want to be able to produce. At university you are doing a lot of English reading and listening related to your studies - journal articles, textbooks, lectures, and more. Use these for your language study, too.

Choose a text you have already read and understood. It should be a text that is written in the style you are trying to learn. Make sure the text is not too long, or choose one paragraph or one page to focus on.

STEP 2: NOTICING

Noticing means actively focussing on aspects of the way English is used in this text.

Each time, focus on one element of English expression that you want to improve. For example:

- Vocabulary and phrases
- Reporting verbs and phrases
- Verb tense
- A/an/the

Then, notice how this element is used in the text. For example:

- Underline vocabulary you want to learn
- Look for sentence structures that may be useful in your own writing
- Look for examples of a particular grammar point, for example verb tense. Try to explain each example (which tense has been used, and why?)

STEP 3: PRACTICE

Practice means doing something to help you remember and use. For example:

- Start a list of words and phrases
- Write your own sentences using the language you have been focussing on
- Check a section of your own writing
- Make a 'gap fill' activity (Cut and paste the extract into a new document. Delete all the instances of the language aspect you've focussed on – for example, all 'a/an/the'. The next day, come back and try to fill in the gaps – then check with the original.)

RESOURCES

The following resources may be helpful to develop/consolidate your English knowledge:

- The Academic Phrasebank website: <http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>
- RMIT's links to English development sites: <https://emedia.rmit.edu.au/learninglab/content/useful-websites>