Developing your academic writing skills: a handbook

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Original Works

Foreword

This handbook offers you advice on how to approach your academic writing, especially in your transition from second to third level. We hope it will provide you with an overview of the knowledge, skills and good working practices needed to craft your academic writing. It will teach you how to apply the conventions of writing at university level; however, equally important is that you will gain the confidence to develop your own voice as an academic writer, a focus that underpins this handbook.

Writing remains one of the main ways you will be assessed in University, so it is an important skill to master. As a craft, writing is a complex task in itself, but it is made all the more challenging in University due to the specialised nature of academic discourse. Writing is also an iterative process and this handbook was designed to reflect this process, divided into sections and tasks to which you can refer or return as you approach and complete the different stages of your academic writing task. This handbook thus provides advice, strategies and writing activities to help you develop your academic writing, and to feel confident in expressing your own voice in your writing.

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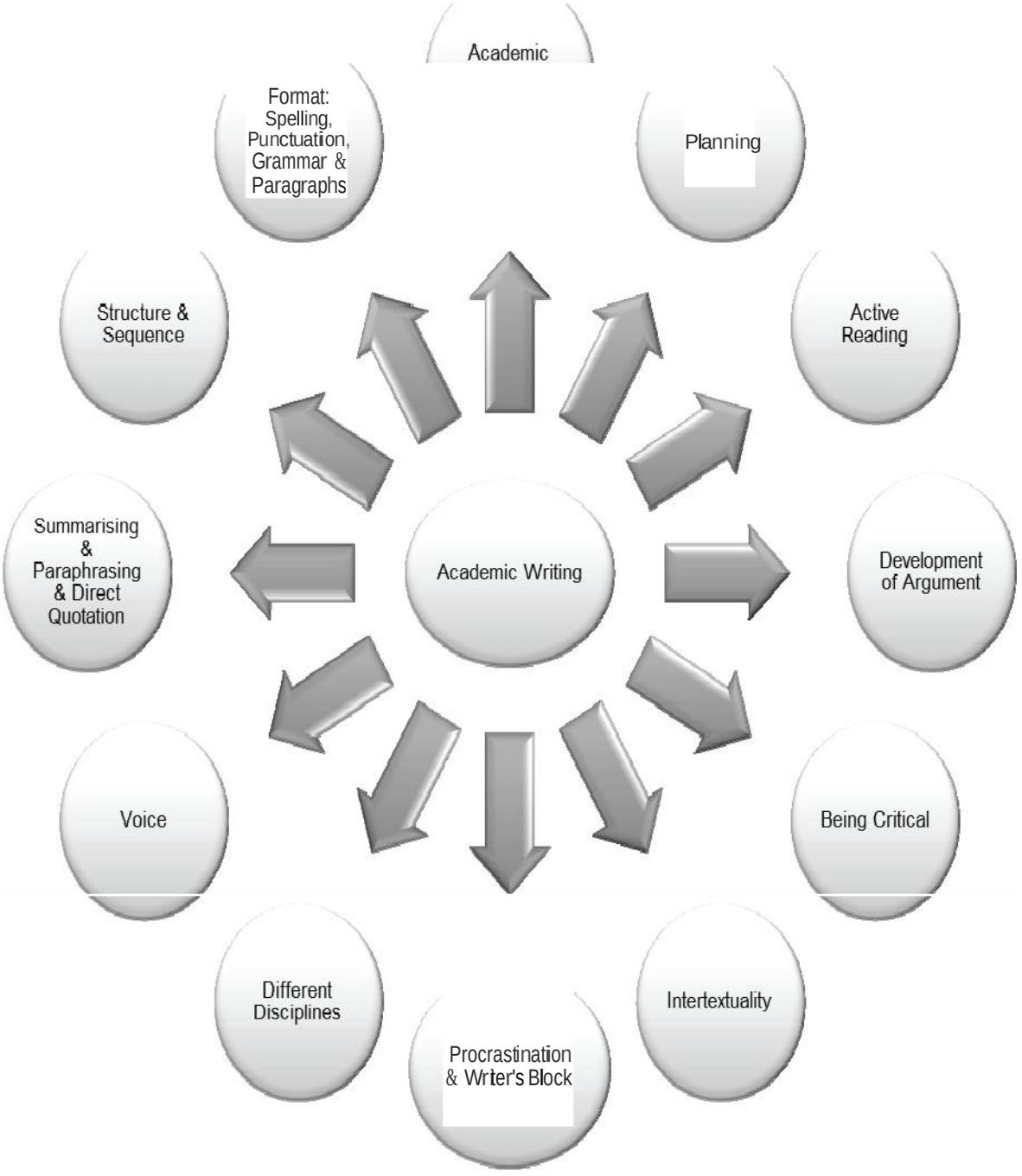
Academic
Format: Spelling, Punctuation, Grammar & Paragraphs
Planning
Structure & Sequence
Active Reading
Summarising & Paraphrasing & Direct Quotation
Academic Writing
Development of Argument
Voice
Being Critical
Different Disciplines
Intertextuality
Procrastination & Writer's Block

HANDBOOK OF ACADEMIC WRITING

This online *Handbook of Academic Writing* is focused on the following key elements of the academic writing process:

- Planning for your writing task
- Reading critically and drawing relevant material from scholarly texts to craft your academic writing
- Being critical
- Intertextuality: Making connections between texts and putting forward your own understanding
- Structuring an argument and substantiating claims or assertions through careful argument
- Finding your voice

Links are provided at the end of the document to recommended online resources regarding:

- writing clear, grammatically correct sentences
- punctuation
- writing paragraphs

Some comments from students in Trinity:

I guess just coming across as professional is kind of a challenge, like avoiding colloquialisms and all that sort of thing, picking the right register, picking the right sort of tone..all that....for a lot of reports they say to use the passive voice.

Getting my own opinions in, I didn't know that was what was wanted .....and I probably tried to cover too many topics so it has to be a lot more focused I think.

What we would mainly get is tips like never use the first or second person, be formal in your language, things like that...

What is Academic Writing?

Academic writing differs from other types of writing such as journalistic or creative writing. In most forms of academic writing a detached and objective approach is required. An academic argument appeals to logic and provides evidence in support of an intellectual position. It is important to present your arguments in logical order and to arrive at conclusions. However, academic writing can take many forms. You may be asked to write an essay, a report, a review or a reflective article. Different styles adhere to each of these types of academic writing, so always check with your lecturer. In academic writing, writers always interact with each others' texts and so there will be frequent references to the ideas, thinking or research of other authors writing in this field. You must give credit to those with whom you are interacting and there are structured guidelines for referencing and citation. Also, in academic writing it is

important that when a claim is made it is backed up by reasons based on some form of evidence; it is expected that the author takes a critical approach to the material being explored (Crème & Lea, 2003 & Borg, 2008). ·

1. Planning for your writing task

Writing typically consists of 4 main stages: planning, writing, editing and reviewing. As writing is an iterative process, these activities do not occur in a fixed order; rather, writers move among these activities although typically, more time is spent on planning or thinking at the start and on editing and reviewing at the end (Hartley, 2008). Planning for your writing has been identified as one of the key practices of good writers (Wellington, 2003) and you need to factor in time to gather, absorb and plan your arguments before composing text.

1.1 Freewriting

Freewriting involves writing in full sentences about a topic for a specified amount of time without planning or worrying about quality; it can help writing at all stages. Elbow & Belanof (2003) argue that freewriting is about trusting yourself and your words; they believe it is especially helpful at the initial stages of academic writing.

Freewriting means

- Not showing your words to anyone (unless you later change your mind);
- Not having to stay on one topic – that is, freely digressing;
- Not thinking about spelling, grammar, and mechanics;
- Not worrying about how good the writing is.

(Elbow, 2000, p. 85)

Most people learn and practise freewriting by doing freewriting exercises of five to ten minutes. It is more than just putting words on paper as it helps improve thinking and also this is the beginning of your voice in the writing. It is really good to do some freewriting or focused freewriting which requires you to stay on one topic on a regular basis. So try it and remember the important thing is to keep writing.

1.2 Using primary evidence or published sources

When reading and gathering information in an academic context, evidence comes from 2 sources, primary and published, although for much undergraduate writing it is acceptable to use published sources only. Primary evidence is the raw data such as questionnaires, interviews, focus groups or experiments that are used by a researcher to gather data to answer a specific research question; they provide proof or insight in regard to the topic or question.

Published sources constitute the literature on a topic, such as books, journals or reports. In journals, published sources from peer-reviewed journals carry most weight. To be published in a peer-reviewed journal, the paper is typically sent out to two or three experts in the field for review and is only published when the reviewers and editor deem it suitable. It is important to read appropriate peer-reviewed journals in your literature when planning your academic writing. Ask your lecturer to recommend some. Further, each academic subject has a Subject Librarian who is very willing to provide training in using the library catalogue and accessing resources and relevant databases. Make time to speak to the Subject Librarian who is there to help you.

- http://www.tcd.ie/Library/support/subjects/index.php

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kwfiGfOYOxk&feature=youtu.be

Activity 1: Getting started—4 things to write.

1. **First of all consider, what is your topic for consideration? Write this in less than 25 words.**

2. **Next brainstorm all the ideas that come to mind. Let your ideas flow and write down everything. Don't censor.**

3. **Now, do some freewriting to a prompt: What do I already know about this topic/question? What do I need to find out? Write for 5 minutes.**

4. **Finally, write a list of books, journals, reports that you need to read. This will help you provide the foundation for your writing /assignment/project.**

1.3 Referencing the work of others in one's own writing

In academic writing, you will almost always draw on the work of other writers: knowing how to reference is key. There are a variety of referencing systems but in all systems, a source is cited in the text with a name or number. The name or number connects with the full source details in a footnote or reference list. The links to the Library and Student Learning Development in Trinity College provide comprehensive detail of different referencing systems:

- Library in Trinity College
  http://www.tcd.ie/Library/support/referencing.php http://www.tcd.ie/Library/support/endnote/
  http://www.tcd.ie/Library/infolit/

- Student Learning Development in Trinity College
  http://www.tcd.ie/Student_Counselling/student-learning/undergraduate/topics/writing/references/
  http://student-learning.tcd.ie/about/what/workshops/

It is important to follow the guidelines that accompany your assignment brief and use the correct referencing system.

1.4 Structure and Sequence

It is useful to think about the structure of an assignment. Simple as it might seem, all written assignments should have 3 parts:

- Introduction
- Main Body
- Conclusion

Completing your assignment: Your writing should contain a strong, coherent argument.		
Sections	**Ideas and Arguments**	**Words**
Introduction	**State the main issues and the issues you will deal with in the paper**	**10% to 15%**
Main Body	**Readings**	**70% to 80%**
Conclusion	**This should not be a summary of all the points made in the assignment/ paper but it should state what you believe to be reasonable conclusions based on the arguments made. It is important to relate the conclusions to the question.**	**10% to 15%**

(Adapted from Nottingham Trent University, Academic Writing Information Sheet)

Activity 2

To help writers achieve an authoritative stance in their introduction, Thompson and Kamler (2013) suggest selecting a passage of writing from the introduction of a published article and deleting its content. What remains is the skeleton that writers can then work with. The example below shows how the writer builds a connection with the field and structures the article. Removing the content makes the syntax visible without plagiarising. 'It makes explicit the ways of arguing and locating used in particular discourses' (p.13). However, do not feel obliged to follow a particular structure if you have your own approach.

In this article, I discuss the main arguments that deal with the issue of

_____.

In distinguishing between _____ it is my purpose

to highlight _____,

by pointing to _____.

Besides providing a map of the _____, I

assess the extent to which these _____ lay a

ground work for_____.

The article is structured as follows. After giving an overview of the

scope of the _____, I review the particular

_____.

Next, I provide a summary of

_____.

Finally, in the last two sections, I consider several implications de-rived from

_____

_____and argue that _____

_____.

(Sentence skeleton from an article by Lavie, 2006, *Education Administration Quarterly*.)

1.5 Procrastination and Writer's Block

We are all guilty of procrastinating when we have difficult tasks to do and with writing, this often happens. It is helpful to recognise what you are doing and realise that you need to get on with the task and then you can reward yourself by doing something you really enjoy. Writer's block is when you just cannot get anything on paper and writers in this situation often complain that the task is too complex (Hartley, 2008). If this happens it can be a real struggle, but once you get going, you often find you enjoy the process. Hartley (2008, p. 167-168) offers the following practical suggestions to get people started:

- Make time to write: if possible, set aside a specific time for writing each day.
- Recognise and label distracters as distracters, and ignore them.
- Do not aim for perfection on the first draft. Let it flow, and then come back to polish it.
- Start by reading what you have produced so far, and spend a bit of time rephrasing things, clarifying or adding in a reference or a quotation.
- Make a note of the structure of the text you want to write – and list its main headings. Then work to these, perhaps one at a time, and not necessarily in order.
- Do not stop writing at the end of a section. Write one or two sentences of the next one and then finish. Pick up from where you left off when you next begin.
- Do not finish the end of a section by running the spell and grammar checker before you switch off. You can do this the next time you begin.
- Do not stop to correct and revise. Keep going and then come back to do this later.
- Reward yourself for meeting your targets.

2. Reading critically and drawing relevant material from scholarly texts to craft your academic writing

In every discipline, writing helps us learn to think critically about our own ideas and the ideas of others. Academic writing is closely linked to reading – you will rarely be asked to write about something without first being expected to read some appropriate texts. In academic writing you will almost always draw on the work of others and so it is essential that you learn to read critically and draw relevant material from other texts. So how do you develop that skill? How do you become a critical reader and draw relevant material from scholarly texts to craft essays?

2.1 Reading Critically

Academic reading is not a passive activity; to become a good academic reader you must approach the text as something that needs a response from you. 'Active Reading' requires a planned approach so that you can begin to grapple with the meaning in the text. When you are ready to read articles, use a method that works best for you to capture key points and issues. You might use a computer programme or pen and paper but always write as you read. Write from the beginning because as you write you are developing content which you can revise and structure later.

When you do this, you are drawing on the work and ideas of an author and it is important to integrate the work of others in an honest way by referencing the original source. Citing sources also shows you are entering the conversation already begun in the academic or professional community. Citing others will improve your academic writing by clearly creating an intellectual basis and framework for your writing and result in better writing (Craig, 2013).

Three skills are particularly important as you write: **Summarising, Paraphrasing and Direct Quotation. Summarising** means writing an overview in your own

words of the main ideas, issues and general meanings of a text. It is about giving a general picture where you cite the original author. Sources help the writer to make a point and academic writers have a responsibility to cite all sources used. **Paraphrasing** means focusing on a particular issue, idea or section in a text and using your own words to put forward the meaning of the original text. In a paraphrase you do not directly quote the text but, again, you must cite the original author. Try and be confident to write in your own voice and to paraphrase in your own words. **Direct Quotation** is usually identified by quotation marks or block indentation and is entirely the words of the original author which you have chosen to use. Use quotation for specific purposes:

- To present a very well-stated passage of text whose meaning would be lessened if paraphrased
- To present an idea or argument to comment on.

If you use an author's specific words, you must place the words within quotation marks, or in block indentation and you must credit the source.

Activity 3: Active Reading

Have a book/journal article or report in front of you that you are planning to read and do the following:

- **Underline key ideas and key terms**
- **Use lines on the margin to draw attention to an important passage**
- **At the end of a chapter or paper, sketch a simple outline of the key arguments or ideas**
- **Write a number of summary sentences to give you an over-all picture of what the reading is about**

Examples of drawing from sources

A sample piece of text on Academic Writing

As you begin your graduate studies it will soon become clear that there are differences between your writing in school and the writing that is expected of you in college. To succeed in college you need to write well in your academic discipline as this is still the primary way in which your learning is assessed and graded. However, academic writing is challenging and good academic writing in all disciplines requires accuracy, logical structure, attention to referencing conventions and eloquence; it is rarely achieved in one draft. In academic writing it is important to lay out the aims and extent of the content material and present it in logical order and arrive at conclusions.

In academic writing a detached and objective approach is required. An academic argument appeals to logic, provides evidence in sup- port of an intellectual position and is distinguished by the lack of an emotional appeal. In academic writing, writers always interact with each others' texts and so there will be frequent references to the ideas, thinking or research of other authors writing in this field. You must give credit to those with whom you are interacting and there are structured guidelines for referencing and citation. Also, in academic writing it is important that when a claim is made it is backed up by reasons based on some form of evidence but it is expected that the author takes a critical approach. (Fitzmaurice & O'Farrell, 2013, p.1)

Example of a Summary

Fitzmaurice & O'Farrell (2013) argue that academic writing is an important skill for college students and is different from the writing they undertook in school. It is challenging as it requires the author to be objective, logical in approach, and critical; when a claim is made it must be supported by evidence. The authors point out that in academic writing it is important to draw on the ideas or research of other authors in the field and correctly reference all sources.

Example of Paraphrasing

Academic writing presents challenges as it demands clarity in presentation, a clear structure, correct referencing and fluency of expression which may not be achieved in one draft (Fitzmaurice & O'Farrell, 2013).

Direct Quotation

Fitzmaurice & O'Farrell (2013, p1) argue that 'academic writing is challenging and good academic writing in all disciplines requires accuracy, logical structure, attention to referencing conventions and eloquence; it is rarely achieved in one draft'.

You have just read some examples of different ways of drawing from your sources to explain a concept or develop a point; you must cite all your sources and ensure academic integrity.

As a student in higher education it is not enough to be able to summarise, paraphrase or quote from what you have read. You need also to engage in critical reading, which requires you to think about, assess and give consideration to the texts of other scholars. The three questions outlined below, which are adapted from Wallace and Gray (2006), provide a framework for a critical reading of a text and build on the work already outlined. Use the same piece of text you were working on and write in answers to the questions.

As you do this in relation to a number of texts, you are making judgements about what different writers are saying; you will also need to adopt a critical stance.

Activity 4: A Critical Synopsis of a Text

Consider the following questions:

1. What are the authors saying that has relevance to my work?

This question requires you to consider the links, if any, to your own project, assignment or research. Answer this question in 25 words.

2. How convincing are the authors' statements?

This question requires you to evaluate the arguments put forward by the authors.

- **What claims are made?**
- **Are there unsubstantiated claims?**
- **What evidence is used to support the arguments? Is there a data set used and, if so, are the claims clearly related to this?**
- **Are the claims consistent with other articles you have read? If not in what way do the claims differ?**

Write one sentence in answer to each of the above questions.

3. What use can I make of this in my assignment?

This question requires you to think about whether this is a key text that you will use and discuss in depth. Think about how the claims made here tie in with what you believe. Or if they can be used to expand or question other claims that you have read. Or will you only refer to it briefly? Freewrite for 5 minutes to answer this question.

Remember to feel free to disagree with the experts, explaining why you do so and that your own analysis is the star; the views of others play a supporting role.

A comment from a Trinity Student.

> *I just thought we were supposed to show that we could bring in, tie in lots of research, but she said there wasn't enough critical analysis—but I don't know how to critically analyse.*

'Critical' is often understood in terms of pointing out what is wrong; students are concerned about being critical of experts in the field. So what does it mean to be critical?

3. Being critical

Being critical is not just about praising or tearing apart the work of others. Adopting a critical stance to a text means paying close attention to the text in terms of definitions, ideas, assumptions and findings or arguments. It is focused questioning and interrogation which is respectful of what others have done and contributed (Kamler & Thomson, 2006). It is not about being negative about the work of others but assessing the contribution of other scholars. Asking and answering the questions which follow will help you as a student to judge the work of other scholars.

Activity 5

- **What is the argument?**
- **What aspect of the topic/argument is spoken about in this article? What evidence is used to back up the argument?**
- **What claims are made by the author?**

As you answer these questions you are moving beyond summaries and into evaluating and becoming critical. The following link is helpful in this regard.

http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/critical.htm

The link forms part of the **Academic Phrasebank,** created by John Morley of the University of Manchester. Morley makes the important point that the phrases are content-neutral and generic in nature and therefore in using them, you are not stealing other people's ideas and this does not constitute plagiarism.

4. Intertextuality: Making connections between texts and putting forward your own understanding

When writing your paper you will read a number of texts; the next stage is to move between the texts and draw ideas together before putting forward your own understanding. This is 'Intertexual' work, an important part of academic writing, where an important task is negotiating how to relate and make connections between the ideas drawn from different writers and putting forward

your own understanding. Almost every word and phrase we use we have heard or read before. So as we create our texts we are influenced by words or ideas already written. Intertextuality means working with a number of texts and relating one text to another. Firstly, it is about drawing on other texts to build a context. It also requires you to think about how to use these texts to inform your argument and make your own assertion. As a new student to university there is a real challenge in deciding how ideas and information are joined, structured and supported. As you work through the activities in this handbook you are involved in focused questioning and examination of a number of texts which will help you to make connections between the texts, and recognise and distinguish the major ideas, arguments and debates about a topic. This is what intertextual work is all about. As you are seeking to analyse relationships among sources it is useful to have a list of phrases which you can incorporate into your own work such as: According to.....or X argues for.....Others have suggested.....y has shown in her study.....In his article Z concludes. The following link is helpful in this regard: http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/conclusions.htm

Activity 6

Find 2 scholarly articles from your own discipline and answer the following questions:

1. **How does the writer create a context using the texts of others?**
2. **How does the writer use the texts of others to build his/her own argument?**
3. **Write down any connections or differences you can see between the two articles.**

5. Structuring an argument and substantiating claims or assertions through careful argument

Argument is a difficult skill to master, developed over time and through practice, and by reading scholarly writing. One of the requirements of higher education is that you read widely and with close attention to the text. Through this reading you will be exposed to a range of books, documents and journals written in

Activity 7: Constructing an argument

1. Select a passage from a scholarly piece of writing in your own discipline which builds a good argument and examine it to see how the author achieves this.

2. Now focus on your own piece of writing. Freewrite for five minutes in full sentences: what is my argument?

3. Read over what you have written and reduce your argument to just 25 words.

4. Answer the following questions.

a. **Does my argument have a clear focus? What exactly am I claiming?**

b. **Does my argument have sound logic? Is there a clear appeal to reason not emotion?**

c. **What evidence can I provide in support of my argument? What is the literature saying?**

d. **Does my argument have a clear, logical structure? Does my argument develop through evidence and analysis? Does it lead to a conclusion?**

different styles. It is important to consider how experienced writers present their work and build an effective argument.

There is no one technique for developing a good argument but argument has a number of key elements including focus, logic and evidence. Good argument shows an ability to express a critical and objective outlook. However, developing an argument takes time and work. In order to construct a strong and logical argument, Leki (1998, p. 258) notes that it is important to avoid these common flaws:

- Exaggeration and unsubstantiated generalisations
- Oversimplification of your argument or of the opposing argument
- Logical flaws
- Appeals to inappropriate authorities
- Emotionally charged words
- Out-of-date facts.

Keep your tone controlled and reasonable and remember that a convincing argument always displays the writer's ability to understand the other side of an argument and to appraise opposing points of view. The skills you are developing include the ability to write in an objective tone, to use relevant sources to support your argument and to provide a logical and systematic analysis. The flow chart below summarises the key issues.

1. Stating your point of view early in the assignment and presenting a clear and consistent rationale to support it.

2. Offering reliable evidence, or illustrative examples, to support your argument. This is evidence that you have read in reputable and authoritative texts, articles, newspapers, Internet sites and so on.

3. Showing where this evidence has come from by citing your sources and listing all your sources in the reference or bibliography section at the end of your assignment.

4. Showing that you are aware of, and have considered, arguments that are counter to your own. You will need to summarise counter-arguments in a clear, accurate and undistorted way.

5. Being able to show why the arguments you have chosen to advance are more convincing than other arguments.

Neville, 2010, p. 10)

The Language of Argumentation

Certain phrases are often used in argumentation and some examples are provided below which you can use to help write your argument.

Words and phrases which can be used in argumentation

- Y argues that…..
- Y suggests that….
- Y contends that…
- Y makes a case that…….
- X develops the argument further by suggesting that……
- X maintains that……..
- X claims that……
- X asserts that……..
- In contrast, Y states that…….
- X concludes that…….

Providing a counter argument

- Despite claims that…..
- Some would argue that…….but
- It has been argued that……., however……..
- However,
- While a lot of evidence points to this conclusion……there is another aspect to be considered……..
- On the contrary……..
- On the other hand……
- Some assert that……but this underestimates the influence of ……

Putting forward your own opinion using the passive voice

- The evidence suggests that…….
- It will be argued…….
- The paper argues……
- The findings indicate……..
- These findings suggest…….
- This seems to imply……

I suppose it feels like when you're in University and you're reading these texts, (like in English, you're doing Shakespeare or something on medieval)...there 's so much written on it already, there's the concern can I say anything of value?

You want to find your voice but it is a real challenge.

They want us to present and assess what's already out there....that's typically the most common thing they want us to do but how do we present our own views, our voice.

6. Finding your Voice

Voice is a difficult concept to define but developing a voice is an important aspect of becoming an effective writer. Every piece of writing has a voice; voice refers to the way we reveal ourselves to others when we write (Richards & Miller, 2005). Voice may be thought of as 'a combination of the personality of the writer that comes through to the reader; the perspective the writer assumes, often influenced by the audience being addressed, as well as by the purpose and previous levels of knowledge, […] and the tone of the passage' (Mulvaney & Jolliffe, 2005, p. 18). However for a novice writer, it can be difficult to find and express your voice.

Remember that each one of us approaches a topic from a different perspective, so we can all make a valuable contribution to debate. Your distinctive individual perspective might reflect your life experiences, your educational background or your philosophical values. There is no expert or scholar whose answers are so perfect that the rest of us need no longer give our opinions on the topic.

Activity 8: Analysing a passage for voice

Read the passage below and answer the questions that follow.

The term “narrative” carries many meanings and is used in a variety of ways by different disciplines, often synonymously with “story”. I caution readers not to expect a simple, clear definition of narrative here that can cover all applications, but I will review some definitions in use and outline what I think are the essential ingredients. Briefly, in everyday oral storytelling, a speaker connects events into a sequence that is consequential for later action and for the meanings that the speaker wants listeners to take away from the story. Events perceived by the speaker as important are selected, organized, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience. Later chapters will expand and complicate the simple definition with research based on spoken, written, and visual materials...The concept of narrative has achieved a degree of popularity that few would have predicted when some of us, several decades ago, began working with stories that developed in research interviews and medical consultations. More than ten years ago, I began to be uneasy about what I called the tyranny of narrative (Riessman, 1997), and the concern has only increased. It is not appropriate to police language, but specificity has been lost with popularisation. All talk and text is not narrative.

(Riessman, 2008, p. 3-5)

1. Analyse the passage for features of voice. Think about whether it sounds informed, authoritative, questioning. Does it sound credible?

2. Describe the voice, drawing on specific items in the passage to support your views.

It takes confidence, practice, time and regular writing to develop your voice but the more you write the more you will develop your own voice. Often the overuse of quotes or paraphrasing without any attempt to discuss the points being made shows that the author is having difficulty finding his or her voice. In academic writing, the use of voice is not about emotion or personal experience, but about being clear, concise, accurate and backing up what is being said with evidence, making a judgement and assessing the contribution of other writers.

6.1 When to use 'I' in your writing

In the above piece, the first-person use is evident as it positions the writer in the text. However, in academic writing use of the first person depends on the discipline. Often, the third person and the passive voice will be used to convey your ideas and arguments. However, the first person can be used effectively, especially in introductions and conclusions. Read some articles from your discipline and see what is typical and what works well.

Whenever you write, a certain voice is being revealed. The challenge is to begin to develop your academic voice. So to develop your voice:

- Read widely and critically
- Note specialised vocabulary
- Observe textual features (these vary by discipline) including conventions such as style preferences for writing in first or third person
- Do not overuse the first person
- Let your ideas flow freely at the start and then impose a structure
- Remember that your personal voice should be informed and knowledgeable
- Establish your credibility by ensuring that you have read enough to have substance for your arguments
- Always respect other perspectives and develop your counterarguments in a respectful tone
- Avoid broad, sweeping generalisations

- Try to get feedback on your work. Ask for honest feedback from a colleague or friend

(Adapted from Lee, 2011)

7. Academic Writing in Different Disciplines

The Handbook offers general advice to support your development in terms of textual investigation and academic writing but each discipline has its own conventions and it is important to take careful note of these in your writing. The lectures in your discipline and the texts you read in each discipline are the most important source of information for discipline-specific writing. The focus so far has been on mastering academic writing but there are disciplinary differences which are important for you to understand so that you can produce good work. This section is to help you to explore writing practices in your subject area or discipline. In order to write well, you need to approach writing tasks with an understanding that writing is discipline specific. Writing in the disciplines varies widely in terms of content, research methods and citation styles (Friedrich, 2008). The citation style in Humanities is very different from Science and Engineering. The use of the passive voice is preferred in almost all cases but there are times when the use of 'I' is acceptable.

To develop your academic writing, you will need to express your own thoughts or views on the material; you cannot rely on the ideas and thoughts of other people. However, in the early years of undergraduate study your contribution will relate to the choice you make about what literature you want to present and to how you analyse it. In the Humanities and Social Sciences, what is important is that your views should be informed, clearly expressed and based on careful consideration

of the views of seminal writers and thinkers on the topic. In scientific disciplines, you must show that you have a complete knowledge and understanding of the

Activity 9: Read and compare two peer reviewed journal articles from your discipline on a topic you are researching and answer the following questions.

	Article 1	Article 2
What is the length of the introductions?		
Do the articles use any headings or sub-headings?		
What is the style of referencing used?		
What is the typical paragraph length?		
How many long quotations are used?		
Does the text use more paraphrasing than quotation?		
Create a list of common verbs used to refer to outside sources and to introduce quotations (e.g. according to, argues that, describes, concludes).		
Does the author use the first person pronoun?		
Does the author make use of diagrams or any other type of visuals?		
What types of evidence is used in making argument?		

(Adapted from Tardy & Courtney, 2008)

relevant scientific principles, but in either discipline it is in the analysis and interpretation that you can make your contribution.

The aim of the activity is to help you become familiar with the style of writing in your discipline so that you can, from the beginning, approach your writing in the way required in your discipline.

Summary Guidelines on Academic Writing
Final Thoughts

- Write every day as writing is a generative process and putting pen to paper helps you to think more clearly
- Start to write early and don't postpone and procrastinate as there is never a perfect time
- Keep your topic in mind and do some freewriting exercises
- Break a large piece of writing into manageable pieces; headings can be useful here
- Write first and edit/revise later as they are different activities.
- Remember that references are a tool to help you to make a point or develop an argument but you must acknowledge your sources
- Ensure all citations and referencing are correct so that the reader understands how sources have been used
- Draft and redraft as you will not get it all right the first time
- Remember that there are stages to writing: planning, free-writing, writing drafts, revising, editing.
- Readers need a route map to guide them through the work so write a good introduction to make it clear what they are about to read.

(Friedrich, 2008; Wellington, 2003; Badenhorst, 2007; Elbow, 1988)

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Useful Links

Defining what Academic Writing is

Learn Higher Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning from the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education http://learnhigher.ac.uk/Students/Academic-Writing.html

What is Academic Writing http://wac.colostate.edu/books/writingspaces1/irvin--what-is-academic-writing.pdf

Disability Service in Trinity College www.tcd.ie/disability/services/AST/Leaflets/Academic/Essays/Academic%20writing.doc

Writing an Essay

http://www.flinders.edu.au/slc_files/images/New%20webpage%20images/Guides/Writing%20an%20Essay.pdf

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/685/01/

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/engagement/index.php?category_id=2&sub_category_id=2&article_id=65

How to read critically

The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/616/01/

Student Learning Development in Trinity College
http://www.tcd.ie/Student_Counselling/student-learning/undergraduate/topics/study-skills/reading/

Harvard Library
http://guides.hcl.harvard.edu/sixreadinghabits

Winthrop University
http://www.winthrop.edu/uploadedFiles/cas/english/ReadingCritically.pdf

Manchester Metropolitan University http://www.mmu.ac.uk/tips/downloads/Criticalreading.pdf

Toronto University
http://ctl.utsc.utoronto.ca/twc/sites/default/files/CriticalReading.pdf
http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/reading-and-researching/critical-reading

Open University
http://www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy/critical-reading-techniques.php

Writing Center - Princeton http://www.princeton.edu/writing/center/resources/DevelopinganArgument.pdf