HUMANITIES WRITING CENTRE

Postgraduate Writing
Academic Writing Style

What is academic writing style?

• Essays, reports, scientific writing, dissertations, theses and other pieces of formal writing should all be written in an academic writing style.

Example:

Roses are red, Violets are blue, Sugar is sweet, and so are you.
However, if it were written in an academic style, it would read like this:

Recent studies have shown that although many roses are indeed red, they can be found in a variety of colours including, pink, yellow and orange (Dimmick et al, 2005; Bill and Ben, 2006). Violets, however, have been shown to be almost always blue, with some exceptions noted in the excellent work carried out by Titchmarch et al (2008). In addition, but not directly related to this, sucrose has been shown to produce a sweet flavour when consumed by most adults (Martie et al 2001, Asrbar 1996). Although one would describe the subject in question as a 'sweet', this is not scientifically sound as the subject is not, of course, an item of confectionery.
Read the two research paper extracts below and then answer questions that follow:

Extract 1

Garner (2013:253–255; cf. Graham 2009:225) highlights three theological views on technology. The first perspective sees technology as liberator. This is an optimistic response that sees technology as liberating force that has the potential to contribute to overcoming the world’s greatest challenges like hunger and poverty in order to improve the human condition. According to this view, digital technology provides the church with more tools and opportunities to reach more people with the gospel and is therefore seen as having a positive influence on church activities and institutional structures.
The importance of academic writing style

Extract 2

Apparently there are 3 theological views on technology. I think there should be more. The first view says that technology makes people feel free. I think this is true. It means that the church has more opportunities to look at challenges like hunger and poverty. It also means that the church can spread the gospel to more people. This is a good thing. Technology makes life easier for the church.
The importance of academic writing style

Questions

• What impression does each extract give of the author?
• Which extract would you rather reference in your own work?
• Which author would you employ on the basis of their research paper?
• If you were the editor of a scientific journal, which one of these papers would you publish?
• If you were a professor marking these papers, who would you give the better mark to?
Key Principles of Academic Writing

- Formal (mainly impersonal);
- Objective;
- Concise;
- Logically structured;
- Cohesive and coherent;
- Grammatical correctness; and
- Authority
Formality

- No colloquialisms/slang
- No contractions
- No shortened forms
- Formality creates a sense of seriousness – the idea that the writer is engaged in what may be perceived to be matters that are important/serious/contributing to a body of knowledge
Objectivity

The main emphasis should be on what you have studied and understood and how this has led you to your various conclusions — and not on what you merely "think" or "believe".

- This depends, to some extent, on the subject-field and supervisor
- However, you should guard against too much self reference
Objectivity

When to use “I”

- **Assertiveness**: If you wish to emphasise agency (who is doing what), as for instance if you need to point out how valuable your particular project is to your academic discipline or to claim your unique perspective or argument.

- **Clarity**: Trying to avoid the first person may sometimes lead to awkward constructions and vagueness, using the first person can improve your writing style.

- **Positioning yourself**: If or when you need to explain how your research or ideas build on or depart from the work of others, the use of the first person is merited.
Authority

The ‘authorial voice’ is heard when:
• you **agree** with those you are responding to;
• you **disagree** with those you are responding to;
• you **attribute** a certain fact or opinion to those you are responding to;
• you **present (proclaim) your own point of view**.
Agreement

• When agreeing with another point of view, use phrases such as *One has to agree that, I agree that, I support the claim that.*

• Agreeing is often not straightforward saying ‘I agree’. The following formulae might help you to formulate your own “I agree” constructions:
Examples of phrases to express agreement

• I agree that __________________ because my experience __________________ confirms it.

• X is definitely correct in saying that __________________ , because recent studies have shown that __________________ .

• X’s theory of __________________ is extremely useful because it sheds light on the difficult problem of __________________ .

• It should be agreed that __________________ , a point that needs emphasis because so many people believe that __________________ .
Disagreement

• The authorial voice positions itself as at odds with, or rejecting another position. Graff and Birkenstein (2006:54) mention five types of reasons.

• The particular view
  • is based on faulty or incomplete evidence;
  • rests on questionable assumptions;
  • uses flawed logic;
  • is contradictory;
  • overlooks what you regard to be the real issue.
Examples of phrases of disagreement

• X’s claim that ______________________ rests upon the questionable assumption that ____________________.

• X contradicts herself. On the one hand she argues that ____________________, but on the other hand she also says ____________________.

• By focusing on ______________________, X overlooks the deeper problem of ____________________.
### Attribution

Making use of reporting verbs to endorse others’ views

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less endorsing (lower degree of agreement)</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>More endorsing (higher degree of agreement)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X believes, thinks, reckons, assumes, presumes, speculates, postulates, suggests, posits, claims, proposes, contends, purports</td>
<td>X argues, comments, says, reports, states, declares, points out, notes, observes, describes, puts forward, explains, proposes, theorizes, predicts</td>
<td>X confirms, agrees, concurs with, makes clear, maintains, stresses, emphasises</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Proclaiming your own point of view

• According to my research
• Certainly, clearly
• The truth of the matter is that, the fact(s) of the matter is (are) that
• It is clear, there is no doubt that, it is undoubtedly the case that
Logical Structure

- Coherence and cohesion in academic writing are mostly created by the purposeful use of connecting devices that highlight the flow of ideas and signal the writers intentions regarding the specific relationship between such ideas.

- Cohesion refers to the connections with the text i.e. at sentence and paragraph level.

- Coherence refers to the overall organisation of the text into recognisable sequence (e.g. text development from the introduction to the conclusion).
Cohesion and Coherence

Cohesion and coherence are important aspects of the structure of academic writing as they have an influence on the readability and logical flow of the argument of a text.

- **What is cohesion?** The logical flow and connection in a written text. It is achieved through the use of devices to link sentences together so that there is a logical flow between ideas from one sentence to the next.

- **What is coherence?** The unity or togetherness of the text as a whole. It is achieved through the effective grouping and arrangement of ideas in a logical order.
Coherence

Cohesion
Cohesion and Coherence

If you want your argument to flow logically, *paragraphs* are essential. To achieve *cohesion* and *coherence*, paragraphs and sentences need to be clearly *linked* to each other to logically and linguistically form a whole. Every paragraph needs a *focus* or a *theme* and all parts of the paragraph must contribute to this.
Cohesion and Coherence: Paragraph structure

**Topic sentence**
- Defines the scope of the paragraph. It also encapsulates or organises the paragraph and relates it to the thesis of the text.

**Supporting evidence**
- Justifies the claims made in the paragraph.

**Elaboration**
- Gives more detail about the claims made in the paragraph.
Cohesion in paragraphs can be achieved by the use of linking devices and logical connectors to link sentences. These devices include:

- Conjunctions (*and, if, but*)
- Pronouns (*it, they*)
- Repetition of certain words
- Logical connectors
Cohesion and Coherence: Logical connectors

- **Additive words** *(also, and, furthermore, moreover).*
- **Order words** *(firstly, lastly, subsequently, ultimately).*
- **Amplification words** *(specifically, for example, such as).*
- **Summarising words** *(in conclusion, in summary, in short).*
- **Repetitive words** *(again, in other words, that is).*
- **Qualifying words** *(although, if, unless).*
- **Contract & change words** *(but, despite, however).*
- ** Cause & effect words** *(because, as a result, therefore).*
- **Emphasising words** *(most importantly/significantly, above all).*
Grammatical Correctness

• Not negotiable.
Engaging with various authors

How do I decide which authors to engage with?

Is the author’s work:

a) Reliable?
b) Opinionated?
c) Relevant to your work?
Engaging with various authors

As an academic writer at postgraduate level, you are expected to form educated opinions based on reliable sources.

How do I know if a source is reliable?

• Is it peer reviewed (e.g. an academic book/journal)?
• Are the author’s credentials or degrees noted?
• If the author is not given, is the organization credible?
• Does the author base his or her findings on sound evidence?
• Is the information timely/recent?
• Is the purpose of the source clear (informing, persuading or amusing)?
Engaging with various authors

How do I differentiate between fact and opinion?

• A fact is **not** open to debate. It should not change in the hands of various authors.

• An opinion is based on an author’s interpretation of the facts and can vary. An opinion is open for debate, but you should always strive to support your opinion with well documented facts and a well thought-out argument.
Engaging with various authors

How do I relay an author’s ideas?

a) **Summarising**: This means that you are identifying the main points of the source for your reader. If you want to summarise an author’s argument you should first identify the main points in the argument, then summarise.

b) **Quoting**: Never quote for the sake of quoting. The majority of your writing should be in your own words and not a series of long quotes strung together. Quotes should be relevant, well-chosen and incorporated correctly into your work.

c) **Paraphrasing**: This means giving the same information as the author, but in different words. This shows that you understand the work well enough to explain it in your own words.
Engaging with various authors

Does my opinion matter?
Yes!

Showing that you can understand and write about the ideas of others is just one step in a well-written argument. As a postgraduate student you are expected to show your opinion on the subject. This should be an educated opinion that is informed by the sources that you have read. This is why it is important to know how to engage with the ideas of another author. You can agree, disagree or partially agree with an author. You just need to support your argument. You should also be able to show how the opinions of different authors are similar or different.