CS3004: Research Methods

Academic Writing
Writing Workshop

- Why is academic writing important?
- What is formal academic writing?
- Referencing
- Abstracts
Why?

- Communication
- Community
- Collaboration
What?

1. **Academic writing is writing done by scholars for other scholars.**

- You are part of a **community** of scholars. You are participating in activities that scholars have been engaged in for centuries: you read about, think about, argue about, and write about great ideas.

- Being a scholar requires that you read, think, argue, and write in certain ways. You need to understand the expectations, conventions, and requirements of scholarship.
2. **Academic writing is devoted to topics and questions that are of interest to the academic community.**

- When you write an academic paper, you must first try to find a topic or a question that is relevant and appropriate.

- **First** of all, you need to define a context into which you can place your questions and observations.

- **Second**, understand that your paper should be of interest to other students and scholars.
Remember that academic writing must be more than personal response. You must write something that your readers will find useful.

In other words, you will want to write something that helps your reader to better understand your topic, or to see it in a new way.
3. **Academic writing should present the reader with an informed argument.**

- To construct an informed argument, you must first try to sort out what you *know* about a subject from what you *think* about a subject.

- Or, to put it another way, you will want to consider what *is known* about a subject and then to determine what you *think* about it.

- If your paper fails to inform, or if it fails to argue, then it will fail to meet the expectations of the academic reader.
What is Academic Writing?

- Academic writing is:
  - Formal
  - Complex
  - Objective
  - Explicit
  - Careful and responsible
How do I choose the right academic level?

Even within academic writing, there are different levels.

Good writers think about their purpose in writing and their readers when deciding how formal their text should be.

It might help to imagine a sliding scale which measures the level of formality.

Extremely informal   -------------------   Extremely formal
Eg. diary, reminder   Eg. legal document
Academic Writing - Formal

- Academic writing is located towards the formal end of the scale.

- This type of writing includes:
  - literature reviews
  - essays that inform argue or evaluate
  - research reports
  - explanation and analysis in case studies.
Academic Writing - Formal

Avoid
- slang, colloquialisms
  - stuff, a lot of,

- abbreviations
  - can’t, doesn’t

- two word verbs
  - put up with, looked into ...

- text speak
  - Pls!
Avoid using slang, jargon, clichés and abbreviations.

Try ‘translating’ the following text into formal writing:

Two detectives latched onto a nice little earner in Dublin where, the Garda Ombudsman’s Commission heard, the enterprising pair managed to filch more than €120,000 from drug dealers in just two months (Evening Times, 13/10/17, p 50).
Possible Answer:

It was alleged at the Garda Ombudman’s Commission that two Dublin detectives extorted more than €120,000 from drug dealers over a two month period.
Avoid using two-part verbs

Replace the two-part verbs:

A primary education system was set up throughout Ireland as early as 1831

This will cut down the amount of drug required and so the cost of treatment.

The material amenities of life have gone up in Western society.

from www.uefap.com/writing/writfram.htm
Academic Writing - Complex

- Complex language
  - more dense than spoken word
  - complex words – prefixes and suffixes
  - use of sub-clauses
  - use of passive voice
Academic Writing - Complex

Active vs. Passive Voice

- Active voice
  - Results *confirm* an increase in the incidence of …

- Passive voice
  - An increase in the incidence of … *is confirmed* by the results.

- Be aware of the difference and of the effect
  - *New measures* *were introduced* to address output problems.
  - *New measures* *were introduced by* management to address output problems.
  - *Management* *introduced* new measures to address output problems.
Academic Writing - Complex

- Use active voice for clarity, energy and for better emphasis.

- Use passive voice to avoid referring to “I”, “We”, “This researcher”, for formality.
Academic Writing - Complex

Passive voice – Exercise

- Prices are stable and we maintain them in this way over generations.

- We define tropical forests here as 'evergreen or partly evergreen forests'.

- Scientists distinguish methane because it has a large number of significant sources.
Focus on the issue, not the writer

- You will have researched the topic and evaluated various viewpoints in order to argue for a particular view.

- Keeping your writing objective and impersonal can make it more convincing. *Avoid the first person.*

Consider:

*It will be argued that the benefits of immigration outweigh the disadvantages.*

in preference to:

*I will argue in this essay that ...*
Academic Writing - Objective

- It’s not about what you think, believe, feel, …
  - Avoid “I”, “my”, “we”, etc

- Stick to what the literature and the primary research says.

- (You can still get your view across, subtly.)
Objective Writing

- Consider:

I would call Wagner a subjective artist. What I mean is that his art had its source in his personality; his work was virtually independent, I always feel, of the epoch in which he lived.

vs:

Wagner was what might be called a subjective artist in that his art had its source in his personality. His work seems virtually independent of the epoch in which he lived.
Choose words with precise meanings

Avoid words with vague meanings as they tend to be more colloquial.

Compare:
The writer looks at the issue
with
The writer examines the issue.
The second option is more formal.

Formal choices: **He states ... maintains ... argues**

Informal choices: **He says ... talks about ...**
Academic Writing - Explicit

- Explicitly signal organisation of ideas

- Make liberal but appropriate use of signals such as
  - however, nonetheless, but, despite,
  - because, since, as a result, therefore, in order to
  - similarly, in addition,
  - in other words, this means, that is to say
  - for example, such as,
  - naturally, obviously, it follows
Make your claims tentative rather than definite

This leaves the door open for further discussion and/or research. After all, it’s unlikely that you’ve reached the only possible conclusion!

Which of these sentences seems more ‘academic’ in tone?
1. Television viewing causes reading problems in childhood.

2. Excessive television viewing may be a contributing cause of some cases of reading problems in childhood.

The second sentence acknowledges that there may be other causes and that reading problems is a large area that would need to be examined.

Words which signal tentativeness include: may; might; possibly; in some instances; often; in many cases
Academic Writing – Careful and responsible

- Don’t exaggerate, on purpose or through inappropriate language
  - *Patients can log on to the website …*
  - *Patients should be able to …*
  - *A majority of patients were able to …*
  - Use often, maybe, possibly, … if necessary

- Report accurately on sources
  - record details carefully and refer back to the source when writing
Academic Reading

1. Read critically!

Check yourself:

- Why is the author writing? For what purpose?
- What is the main argument?
- What supporting points and evidence is used? Is it fact or opinion?
- Is the author strongly influenced by a specific issue or interest such as traditional views, minority group challenges, outdated or prejudiced ideas?
Academic Reading

2. Read efficiently!

Check yourself:

- Do you skim the structure of the paper/book/chapter/website?
- Do you read the abstract if it’s a paper?
- Do you look for parts relevant for your purpose so that you can later zoom in?
- Have you noted the date/place of publication or electronic source, then table of contents and layout of book?
- Which chapters will be most helpful?
- Did you read the first and last paragraphs, skimming the headings?
- In one sentence ... what is it about?
3. Record bibliographic details!

Check yourself:
- Did you record....
  - Author's surname and initials?
  - year published?
  - publisher and location?
  - title of book/article/journal?
  - page numbers especially when taking quotes or figures?
  - dates that you accessed online sources?
Academic Reading

4. Focus your attention by reading with your research question/s in mind!

5. Paraphrase!
   - Rewrite the information in your own words, keeping your language objective.

**EXAMPLE 1**
The success of Cook's voyage has been attributed, in part, to improved methods of navigation and nutrition (Blainey, 1996, pp11-13)

OR

I think Cook's success is because of great skills and his outstanding fitness.
EXAMPLE 2
Research proves kids get rough because of television.
OR
Brown, James and Barrow (1996, pp45-50) argue that violence on television might encourage children to use violence in the playground.

EXAMPLE 3
You can always see into your mind through your dreams says Freud.
OR
Dreams may provide an insight into what is happening in the dreamer's conscious mind (Freud, 1993; Jung, 1978)
WHAT SHOULD YOU PUT IN YOUR NOTES?

- Main ideas
- Outline of smaller points under each main idea.
- Definitions, glossaries of meanings, examples, statistics, diagrams...
- Reference details (e.g. page number)
Academic Writing

Start with a Draft

- Structure
  - Introduction
  - Body
    - Topic 1
    - Topic 2
      - Subtopic 2.1
  - Conclusion

- Fill in the sections
Academic Writing

- **CHECKING**

  - **Check your ideas**
    - Are they organised logically and linked well to each other?
    - Can the reader get the message accurately?
    - Do they all relate to the assignment?
    - Does the introduction define terms, indicate direction and preview arguments?
    - Does the body give evidence, examples or explanations in each paragraph?
    - Does the conclusion restate the point of view, sum up points and review?
Check your spelling, grammar and punctuation

- If they are wrong, the reader is distracted from your ideas, or may misunderstand.
- It also looks like you didn't take much care with your work.
- Use a spelling and grammar checker (computer and person).

Check your presentation

- Have you done what was asked?
- E.g. Have you produced a typed essay or pdf? Cover sheets with your details on it e.g. name, course, subject, assignment, lecturer, due date? Numbered pages? Your bibliography and/ or reference list?
Academic Writing

- **EDITING**

  - **Read it aloud and listen(or tape it).**
    - Many people express ideas by speaking, but write unfinished sentences or don't include commas to break up the message into chunks, or are far too long. You can usually hear the mistakes.

  - **Proof-read**
    - Have you used the best words to connect ideas in the different parts of your sentences, or between sentences? These *connectors* give cohesion, and make it stick together properly.
Writing Essays

- **Check the references**
  - Do all the "direct quotes" and paraphrased information from readings have the following information in parentheses after the information?
    - author's surname
    - year of publication
    - page number/s

- **Check your bibliography**
  - Check your bibliography. Have you listed all sources you referred to in gathering information for your essay?
What is Referencing?

- Academic referencing is a systematic way of acknowledging the sources of information in academic writing.

- There is no one universally correct way to reference. However, there are several referencing styles which have been developed.

- Different academic institutions, and faculties within those institutions, have guidelines for referencing style which students are expected to follow.

- The system that you will use is the Harvard Referencing System.

- No matter what system you use the important thing is consistency.
Why Reference?

- A lot of academic writing is broadly based on the concept of **developing an argument**.

- This is usually done by reading widely on the particular topic, critically **evaluating** what you have read, and finally, presenting your argument.

- Referencing
  - **demonstrates** that you have researched and considered the ideas of others in presenting your argument.
  - **prevents** you from ‘plagiarising’.
What Should be Referenced?

- **General knowledge** and information that the general public could be assumed to know *does not* require referencing.
  
  E.g.: ‘The human immune system fights infections’.

- However, information that the general public would have to research to learn about *does* need to be referenced.
  
  E.g.: ‘Neutrophils fight infections by phagocytosing bacteria’.

- Also, information that is **contentious (arguable or an opinion rather than a fact)** *should* also be referenced.
  
  E.g.: ‘Garlic is effective in fighting against viral infections’.
How do I Reference Fully?

- The easiest way to approach referencing is to prepare for it from the moment you begin your research.

- This preparation will save you rushing around madly the week before your dissertation is due, trying to find your sources again.
How do I Reference Fully?

- Do the following 2 things and you will never find yourself in this situation:

  1. **As soon as you find a source, list the details that you’ll need for the References.**

  2. **Keep a record of the author, date and page number as you are reading and taking your notes.**
How do I Reference Fully?

- You will need, for each item you include, the following information:
  - **Book**: author or editor; year of publication; title; edition; place of publication and publisher
  - **Journal article**: author; year of publication; title of article; journal title; volume/issue number; page numbers of the article
  - **Electronic information**: author/editor; year of publication; article title; journal title; web URL; name of database; date accessed
How do I Reference Fully?

- The two essential types of referencing that you will use are:
  - **In-Text**
  - **The List of References** (presented at the end of your dissertation).
Compiling the References

- The References should provide enough specific details to allow your reader to physically access the same source that you have used.

- It should also follow the conventions of a recognised system. The system described here is the Harvard system.
Compiling the References

- **For all citations/references:**
  - Use the specific punctuation, layout and abbreviations given.
  
  - Alphabetise your list of citations by author/editor surname.
  
  - If no author is given, start with the title.
  
  - If more than one entry for an author put in date of publication order. If two of the same date use 2017a, 2017b etc..
  
  - If no date of publication is available, use *(undated)* or *(no date)* instead of the date - showing you haven't just forgotten to include the date.
The way that you record reference details in your References will depend on the source of the information. Here are some of the most common...
Compiling the References

- **Book with one author**
  - Author's last name, First and Second Initial. (Year) Title italic. Place of publication: Publishing company.

  **Example:** McDonagh, S. (2001) *Why are we Deaf to the Cry of the Earth*. Dublin: Veritas.
Compiling the References

- **Book with an editor**

  Editor's last name, First and Second Initial. (Ed.). (Year) Title italic. Place of publication: Publishing company.

Compiling the References

- **Chapter in an edited book**
  - Author's last name, First and Second Initial. (Year) 'Chapter title'. In: Editor's(s) name and initials. ed(s). *Book title*. Place of publication: Publishing company.

Compiling the References

- **Electronic article**
  - Electronic article Author's last name, First and Second Initial. (Year) Article title. *Journal title* [Internet], Date of publication, Volume(issue), page numbers. Available from: <internet address> [Accessed date].

Compiling the References

- **Journal article - print**
  - Author's last name, First and Second Initial. (Year) 'Article title'. *Journal title*, Volume number (Part):page numbers.

Compiling the References

- **Newspaper article**
  - Author's last name, First and Second Initial. (Year) Article title. *Newspaper title*, date, page numbers.

Compiling the References

- **Page on a Website**
  - Webpage author's last name, First and Second Initial. (Year) **Article title** [Internet], edition if available eg. update or version 4.1. Place of publication, Publisher if ascertainable. Available from:<internet address> [Accessed Date]

Compiling the References

- **Website**
  - Website name. (Year) **Website** [Internet]. Place of publication, Publisher if ascertainable. Available from:<internet address> [Accessed Date]

In-Text Referencing

- In-text referencing for published printed works should always indicate:
  
  - Author’s surname
  
  - Year of publication
  
  - Page number(s)
In-Text Referencing

- What if it doesn’t make sense to refer to a page number?

- If there is no specific page, or group of pages, that you can refer to because the source is not marked that way (e.g. some internet sources) or because the source type doesn’t have page numbers (e.g. Video recording), then you don’t include a page number.
In-Text Referencing

- If the idea you are acknowledging came from a whole publication, you don’t need to show page numbers.

- For instance, sometimes, a central theme of an entire published work may be cited. In this case, page numbers are not included. E.g.:
  - Human personality evolves from a complex interaction between the forces of nature and nurture (Zimbardo, 1996).
In-Text Referencing

Books by a single author

- Use the author’s surname, date and the page (p) /pages (pp) on which you found the information. There are several ways this information can be included:

- **Put all the details in brackets, not in your words:**

  The assumption that a child’s personality is largely moulded by parental nurturing has been challenged (Harris, 1998, pp. 1-33).
Harris (1998, pp.1-33) argued against the assumption that parents significantly influence the personality development of their children.

It was argued by Harris in 1998 (pp.1-33) that parents do not mould the personality of their children to any significant extent.
In-Text Referencing

Books by multiple authors

- The first time you reference this work, list all the authors.

- Follow the order of their names as shown on the book’s title page.

- For subsequent references to the same work, you may use the first author’s name, followed by ‘et al‘ (short for *et alia* a Latin term meaning ‘and others’).
In-Text Referencing

For example:

The first reference to a work may read:

Brown, Jones and Barrow (1996, pp.45-50) argued that violence on television might encourage children to use violence in the playground.

Subsequent references to that same work may then be written:

Brown et al (1996, p.101) concluded that a strong correlation was found between excessive viewing of violence on television in childhood and violent behaviours in adult life.
In-Text Referencing

- When you quote from another source, you must ensure your writing reads fluently and that the quotation fits in its new context.

- Quotations should not simply be stuck in to prove you have read them.

- When you quote or paraphrase:
  - it must be relevant to your argument
  - it must join neatly with what comes before and after
  - it must make logical and grammatical sense
  - it should be no longer than is necessary
How are Direct Quotations Used?

- **How much can I quote?**
  
  Direct quotes (word for word) should be kept to a minimum (no more than 10% is a common guideline).

- Avoid a chain of quotes, as this does not show any evidence that you have understood or critically evaluated what you have read.
How are Direct Quotations Used?

- **How do I set out a quote?**
  If the quotation is **short** – less than about thirty words – it should be contained **within the text inside quotation marks**.

- **E.g.:**
  - Marriage may be characterised by a sense of partnership, while, at the same time, providing the opportunity for individual growth. This philosophy was perhaps best expressed by the poet Gibran (1923, p.37) who said “Love one another but make not a bond of love”.

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How are Direct Quotations Used?

- **Longer** quotations should be set out as **separate** passages **without quotation marks**. The passage should be **indented**.

- **E.g.**:

  Marriage in Irish society may be characterised by a sense of partnership while at the same time, providing the opportunity for individual growth. This philosophy was perhaps best expressed by the poet Gibran (1923, pp.37-38)

  Love one another, but make not a bond of love, rather, let it be a moving sea between the shores of your souls. Fill each other’s cup, but drink not from the same cup. Sing and dance together and be merry, but let each one of you be alone, as the strings of the lute are alone, though they quiver with the same music.
Referencing and Plagiarism

- Plagiarism is the action or practice of taking and using someone else’s thoughts, ideas or writings as if they were your own.

- It is, really, a form of stealing – it’s just that what is being ‘taken’ is intellectual (ideas), not material or physical.

- All academic institutions regard plagiarism as a serious breach of ethics and students are strongly advised to be diligent in acknowledging their sources of information.

- Referencing is the way in which we acknowledge that we have been informed by the work of others. Thorough referencing prevents plagiarism.
Plagiarism

Trinity College:

'Plagiarism is interpreted by the University as the act of presenting the work or ideas of others as one’s own work, without due acknowledgement… Plagiarism is considered to be academically fraudulent, and an offence against academic integrity that is subject to the disciplinary procedures of the University.'

For more information see the College Calendar: https://www.tcd.ie/calendar/graduate-studies-higher-degrees/introduction-and-general-regulations.pdf
Avoiding plagiarism

- **Deliberate plagiarism is easy to avoid.**
  - Don’t cut and paste any text from anywhere!

- **Unintentional plagiarism is common**
  - using notes that you made while reading but didn’t note the source or that they were quotes
    - if the quotes end up in your text unacknowledged you’ve plagiarised
  - paraphrasing someone’s ideas without acknowledging whose ideas
  - use distinctive language or phrases from another author, without acknowledgement.
  - Come across a distinctive methodology and fail to record the source
Avoiding plagiarism

- Direct quotation
  - use “…” quotation marks
  - use exact words
  - acknowledge source
  - use [...] brackets if you remove or change anything
  - Only use direct quotes where the original text is worthy of quotation
    - not just out of laziness, where you should paraphrase
Avoiding plagiarism

- Paraphrasing
  - Acknowledge original source
  - Do use your own words, not original ones
Avoiding plagiarism

- Summarizing or referring to another’s ideas, theories, models, arguments results, insights, interpretation, data, …
  - Anything that required effort, intellectual or manual, must be acknowledged.
  - Also acknowledge all tables, figures, images
Avoiding plagiarism

- **Distinctive language or phrase**
  - coined by another author or
  - used by another author in a specific way that you want to use
  - Acknowledge the source, and maybe explain in a footnote the meaning in its context.
Bibliography vs. List of References?

- A Bibliography lists **both** textual references and other works which may have informed your thinking but which you did not explicitly cite in the text of your dissertation.

- A Bibliography is **comprehensive**, as it lists **all** the reading you did, including background reading.

- A list of references, on the other hand, contains **only** the works you have cited or referred to in the text.
References – Check list

- **Check**
  - Did you record....
    - Author's surname and initials?
    - year published?
    - publisher and location?
    - title of book/article/journal?
    - page numbers especially when taking quotes or figures?
    - dates that you accessed online sources?
References – Checklist

- **Check**
  - Do all the "direct quotes" and paraphrased information from readings have the following information in parentheses after the information?
    - author's surname
    - year of publication
    - page numbers

- **Check**
  - Check your References. Have you listed all sources you referred to?
Grammar and Punctuation

- Some of my pet complaints:
  - **Punctuation**
    - Running sentences into one.
    - See [http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/commassplice.html](http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/commassplice.html) for advice.
    - Overuse of commas.
  - [www.uefap.com](http://www.uefap.com) Punctuation section of Writing section
  - **Apostrophes for possessives!**
    - “Nurses’ workload” = workload of nurses
    - “The nurse’s complaint” = the complaint of the nurse
    - Don’t put a ‘ before an s unless there’s some possession going on!
    - “it’s” only means “it is”, never the possessive of “it”.
    - “It’s” is like “his” or “hers” – “Its beginning coincided with…”
Abstracts

- What is an abstract?

  An abstract is a succinct summary of a longer piece of work, usually academic in nature, which is published in isolation from the main text and should therefore stand on its own and be understandable without reference to the longer piece.

  It should report the text’s essential facts, and should not exaggerate or contain material that is not there.
Its purpose is to act as a reference tool (for example in a library abstracting service), enabling the reader to decide whether or not to read the full text.
Abstract

- It is not an introduction to your paper but a summary.

- Preparing a good abstract within the word limits requires a lot of mental effort and it is easy to do a poor job by falling into the “table of contents” trap.
Here is a “table of contents” abstract from a paper about how to write an abstract:

What should be covered by an abstract is considered. The importance of the abstract is described. Dictionary definitions of “abstract” are quoted.
The “Table of Contents” Approach

Here is what the abstract should have said:

*The abstract is of utmost importance, for it is read by 10 to 500 times more people than read the entire article. It should not be a mere recital of the subjects covered, replete with expressions as “is discussed” and “is described”. It should be a condensation and concentration of the essential qualities of the paper.*
1. Pay attention not only to what others are saying, but also to how they are saying it. Notice that sound arguments are never made without evidence.

2. Don't confuse evidence, assumption, and opinion. Evidence is something that you can prove. Assumption is something that one can safely infer from the evidence at hand. Opinion is your own particular interpretation of the evidence.
4. Pay attention to the requirements of an assignment. When asked for evidence, don't offer opinion. When asked for your opinion, don't simply present the facts. Too often students write summary when they are asked to write analysis.

5. Familiarize yourself with new language. Every discipline has its own jargon. While you will want to avoid unnecessary use of jargon in your own writing, you will want to be sure before you write that you have a clear understanding of important concepts and terms.
6. Don't make the mistake of thinking that because something is in print it has cornered the market on truth. Your own interpretation of a text might be just as valid (or even more valid) than something you've found in the library or on the internet. Be critical of what you read, and have confidence that you might say as much.

7. Pay attention to standards and rules. You are expected to write carefully and clearly. Your work is expected to be free of errors in grammar and style. You are expected to follow the rules for citing sources and to turn in work that is indeed your own. If you have a question about a standards, ask. I am happy to help.