

For the Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences

Academic Writing

Learning and Teaching Unit

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Overview

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This workshop will address the following:

- writing for an audience;
- writing with a purpose;
- organising the text;
- using an appropriate style;
- writing cohesively and coherently;
- evaluating the writing; and
- acknowledging sources of information.

Activity

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Read the excerpt below and analyse the content. With your partner, rewrite the text to make it more academic.

According to Marjoribanks (2002, p. 370), there are two major factors influencing teenagers' likelihood of staying in school: different family backgrounds as well as adolescents' individual characteristics and learning-related issues. It cannot distinguish which factor is more important as the author also points out that the latter one does mediate the relationships between family background and the likelihood of staying in school. Therefore, from my point of view, it is better to take both the two factors into considerations in terms of thinking of factors affecting teenagers' likelihood of staying in school.

Possible revisions?

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Read the excerpt below and analyse the content. Then with your partner rewrite the text to make it more academic.

Good idea to begin with a topic sentence and then justification

The writer goes on to list three factors

According to Marjoribanks (2002, p. 370), there are two major factors influencing

Awkward!

teenagers' likelihood of staying in school: different family backgrounds as well as

What does 'it' refer to?

adolescents' individual characteristics and learning-related issues. It cannot distinguish

Former and latter are used for 'two'

which factor is more important as the author also points out that the latter one does

mediate the relationships between family background and the likelihood of staying in

First person pronoun not encouraged

school. Therefore, from my point of view, it is better to take both the two factors into

considerations in terms of thinking of factors affecting teenagers' likelihood of staying in

school.

Sample answer

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Various factors influence the reasons as to why teenagers stay in school. Marjoribanks (2002, p. 370) identified three factors, namely, 1) family backgrounds; 2) individual characteristics; and 3) the learning environment. * It is not clear which of these factors play a more important role in motivating adolescents to stay in school. Thus in examining factors that keep teenagers in school, it is important to consider all aspects.

- * It would be a good idea to include more evidence here.
- * The writer would be expected to expand on this more.
- * Use of tenses to differentiate between your voice and other people's opinions.

Writing for the audience

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Who are you writing for?

Your instructor who is:
an expert in the field;
familiar with the topic; and
well-read and is up-to-date with the debates.

Who is the audience?

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1) Rizvi's (2004) adaptation of 2) Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) notion of a 3) cultural field is insightful in establishing the 4) normative basis of neo-conservative claims about SOSE. Bourdieu (1997, 1999) depicted a cultural field as a changing system of institutions, practices, rules and interactions that authorise particular activities and discourses. Rizvi (2004) draws on this to conceptualise a 4) 'discursive field', as a range of assumptions made implicitly in the debates about a specific issue or topic. That is, which ideas are presumed to have authority and which notions are considered inappropriate for discussion?

- * Use of discipline specific terminology
- * Definitions of concepts/theories
- * Reference to other scholars in the discipline
- * Justification with clear and coherent arguments

What is the purpose of the text?

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- Audience, purpose and strategy are interconnected.
 - Instructional: if the audience knows less than the writer.
 - Demonstrating familiarity, expertise and intelligence : if the audience knows more than the writer.
- Strategy : how best to communicate your information so that it is logical, cohesive and coherent.
 - Do you need to say everything or say particular things well?

Organising the text

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- Information should be presented to readers in a structured format.
- All genres will have regular, predictable patterns of organisation.
 - Essay : Introduction, body, conclusion
 - Report : Executive summary, introduction, literature review (optional), methodology, results, discussion, recommendations.
 - Journal article : Abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, results, findings and discussion, implications for practice.

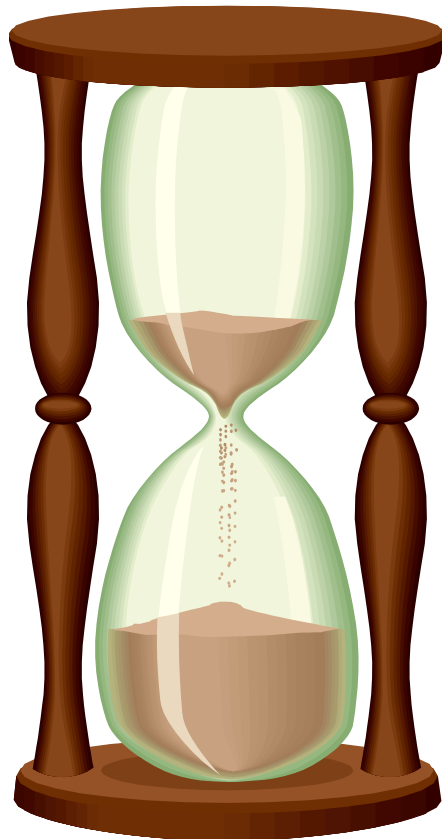
Activity

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With a partner look at page 2 of Handout 1. Read and analyse the way the text has been organised. Indicate on the handout the role of the different sections.

Organisation

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Introduction

- General proposition

- Existing issues/problems

- Aims (What is the purpose of the paper)

- Scope (How is the discussion organised)

Body

- Topic sentence

- Supporting statement (evidence & justification)

- Example

Conclusion

- Thesis statement (main message)

- Restating key ideas

- Concluding statement

Style

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- Task must be written in an appropriate style.
- Style must be consistent and appropriate for audience:
 - **shows understanding** of the topic;
 - **explores issues** in the field of study;
 - **identifies position** in relation to the issues;
 - **uses evidence** effectively;
 - **displays critical and analytical** skills;
 - **presents a logically persuasive argument** supporting their position;
and
 - **identifies the relevance** of argument.

Language focus

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- Use single verb whenever possible

e.g. According to some educators, **coming up** with clear proof of the increasing numbers of bullying in high school has been difficult.

According to some educators, **obtaining** clear proof of the increasing numbers of bullying in high school has been difficult.

- Choose words that are more formal and more precise.

e.g. Early childhood educators **are really important for**/an integral part of the education system.

Ideally, there should be one teacher for **just about**/nearly every 10 students.

Language focus (cont'd)

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- Use formal language (e.g., 'however' instead of 'but').
- Use tentative language to qualify generalisations (probably, seems, might be, etc.).
- Use repetition of key words/themes.
- Make greater use of passive forms:
 - “A variety of subjects are taught in the program.”
 - “Teachers teach a variety of subjects in the program.”

Formal grammar

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- Avoid contractions:

e.g. Export figures **won't** improve until the economy is stronger.

Export figures **will not** improve until the economy is stronger.

- Use the more appropriate formal negative forms:

e.g. The analysis **didn't** yield any new results.

The analysis yielded **no** new results.

- Limit the use of 'run-on' expressions, such as ***and so forth***
and etc.

e.g. The information can be found in books, articles, ***etc.***

The information can be found in books, articles and other reference material.

Formal grammar

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- Avoid first person (I, we) and second person (you) pronoun

e.g. **You** can be classify individuals as Morning Types (MTs), Evening Types (ETs) or Neither Types (NTs).

Individuals can be classified as Morning Types (MTs), Evening Types (ETs) or Neither Types (NTs).

- Try not to use direct questions

e.g. **What can be done** to lower costs?

It is necessary to consider how costs may be lowered.

- Place adverbs within the verb

e.g. **Actually**, very little is known about the general nature and prevalence of academic dishonesty.

Very little is **actually** known about the general nature and prevalence of academic dishonesty.

Flow

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- An important consideration for successful communication is flow.
- Establish a clear connection of ideas to help your reader follow the text.
 - Linking words and phrases can help a writer maintain flow and establish clear relationships between ideas.

<http://resource.unisa.edu.au/mod/book/view.php?id=25021&chapterid=10745>

Activity

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Read the text on page 3 of Handout 1. Identify instances in the text where linking words may improve the flow of the discussion.

Evaluating the writing

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- Errors can be avoided by careful proofreading. Avoid:
 - incorrect homophones (too/to/two);
 - basic grammar errors (subject-verb agreement);
 - misspelled words;
 - verb tense errors;
 - incorrect use of articles; and
 - punctuation.

Activity

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Read the excerpt below and rewrite the text to demonstrate academic writing.

I would say 'personal motivation' is one major factor in affecting students' decisions making in terms of staying in school. I agree with the statement. Students own choices and goals-setting play the key role in shaping their future. After all, they would need to face and deal with their own challenges along on the path they have chosen and be happy about. Expectations from their families can be crucial to them. It all depends on how they communicate with their parents and how independent a student is and if they are aware of what's in front of them with the choice they are making to finish year 12 or not.

Acknowledging the source

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- **Referencing is important to:**
 - demonstrate your learning from expert sources;
 - show that your evidence is not anecdotal;
 - establish that you are actively participating in the academic debate of your discipline; and
 - acknowledge expert opinions, ideas or views.

Summary

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- Write for the audience.
- Write with a purpose and strategise to communicate the information optimally.
- Organise the text in a logical manner.
- Write in an academic style.
- Ensure that there your arguments flow by writing cohesively and coherently.
- Present high quality task by proofreading and editing your work.

References

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- Swales, JM & Feak, CB 2007, *Academic writing for graduate students: essential tasks and skills*, 2nd edn, University of Michigan Press, USA.
- Davies, M 2011, *Study skills for international postgraduates*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.