**Academic writing**

**Slide 1: Introduction**

This is a presentation on academic writing. In the university, you are expected to demonstrate particular conventions when listening, speaking, reading and writing. As a significant proportion of your grades come from the writing component, this presentation attempts to draw your attention to academic writing conventions. Do engage with this presentation and try to incorporate the aspects in your own writing.

**Slide 2: Structure of genres**

There are many different genres that you would be expected to produce in your study program. On this slide you can see a few of them. Each of these genres or text types would have its own structures and layout. It is important for you to find out what is the structure of the genre that you are expected to produce and demonstrate that in your assessment task. Most genres will have some form of introduction, a body section and a conclusion. It is also important to be aware that in different courses you may be required to produce the same genre but the expectations from your instructors and the marking criteria may be different. For example, in one course, you may be asked to write an essay but in another course, you may be asked to write a reflective essay. Although, both the tasks are essay genres, the writing style in each of this will differ. That is why you need to be very clear about what the task expectations and the marking criteria are.

**Slide 3: Writing style**

When you are producing your assignments for your study program, you are expected to demonstrate academic writing style. This writing style is very different from writing for every day communication in that it is formal, uses disciplinary terminology, refers to the concepts and theories related to the discipline and adheres to particular conventions. The first thing you have to demonstrate in your writing is that you have understood the topic or question that has been set for your assessment task. Your instructors can quickly identify whether you have understood the requirements by looking at your discussion. After reading widely and critically, you need to decide what your position or stand is in relation to the topic. This will help you organise your thinking around the topic and find the relevant literature to support your view. You can read in whichever language that you are familiar with to understand the topic. However, the discussion must be written in English so you need to be aware that the language system in English may be quite different from the other languages in which you have undertaken your research.

Do also ensure that you highlight the relevance of the argument. This means making the significance of the topic clear and highlighting why it is important to discuss it. Make sure that you explore the related issues, in depth. Doing a superficial discussion about the topic is not going to get you good marks. It is better to concentrate on three or four issues and do a detailed discussion rather than undertake a superficial discussion of six or seven issues. Once you have obtained the evidence from your reading, do ensure that you use the evidence effectively. Do not quote or copy word for word. The evidence must only be used to support your argument. You should not use the evidence to replace what you need to say. Do demonstrate your critical and analytical skills. What are the scholars saying about the topic? Is there subjectivity or bias? What does the evidence mean for your discipline, context and future practice? What are the implications of this? Don’t just repeat what others have stated. You would also have to present a logical and persuasive argument so that your readers are convinced about what you are saying.

**Slide 4: Audience, Purpose, Strategy**

In order to produce high quality writing, you need to be aware of the audience, purpose and strategy. All these components are clearly linked. First, you need to know who you are writing for. In most instances, you will be writing for your instructor who is an expert in the field, is familiar with the topic and is well-read and well-informed about the debates that take place in the discipline. Your instructor would have particular expectations of you. You need to demonstrate to them that you have widely and critically read the relevant literature in the discipline. You also need to be clear about the purpose for which you are writing the task. Tasks have different purposes and it is the purpose that will direct your writing. It is really important to understand this before you begin writing. So, do ensure that you clearly understand the task and its requirements.

Once you know your audience and the purpose of the task, you need to identify the best strategy to communicate the message. Do identify how you will communicate the message logically, critically, coherently and cohesively. All these aspects will weigh heavily on the grades that you get for the task. It is always a good idea to have an outline or an essay plan before you begin your actual writing, as this will ensure that you address the topic and do not digress.

**Slide 5: Language use**

As was mentioned earlier, academic writing adheres to particular conventions. On this slide and those that follow, you are provided with some conventions that are generally applied in academic writing. Do take a few moments to look at the conventions and their examples. You would be expected to demonstrate these in your own assessment tasks.

**Slide 6: Language use (cont’d)**

Here are some more of the conventions that you should demonstrate when producing your assessment tasks. You will notice that the third example contradicts with the earlier suggestion that you use more active rather than the passive voice. This example has been used simply to draw your attention to the fact that some instructors would not want you to use the first and second person pronoun. Always confirm with your instructor before you begin writing. In the fourth example the adverb ‘actually’ can change the meaning of the sentence depending on where it is placed. The rule is always place the adverb next to the verb if you want to place emphasis on the verb.

**Slide 7: Language usage (cont’d)**

On this slide you can see some more conventions that are associated with academic writing. You can find out more about this from any text on academic skills.

**Slide 8: Flow**

You may have a lot of content but if you do not write cohesively and coherently, you may lose marks. You need to ensure that your discussion or arguments are cohesive. This means that your writing flows from one idea to another and one paragraph to the next smoothly. You need to make sure that you create links within and between paragraphs. Transition and linking words can help you do this. On this slide you can see some examples of such words. You do not need to use all of them in one assignment. However, using them appropriately will help create cohesion in your discussion.

**Slide 9: Integrating evidence**

In academic writing, a significant role is attributed to citing the sources. You cannot solely write your task based on your opinion and views. In order to support your arguments and to make it more credible, you are required to refer to what other people have said about the same topic. Thus referencing is an important skill that you are expected to demonstrate in your study program. You need to demonstrate that you are learning from expert sources and that your evidence is not anecdotal. By referencing, you will also demonstrate to your instructors that you are actively participating in the academic debate of your discipline. Finally, it is important to acknowledge the expert opinions, ideas and views of others from whom you sourced the information. It is not acceptable to take someone else’s ideas without acknowledging them.