**Bachelor of Communication and Media**

**Academic language for assessments**

**Slide 1: Introduction**

Students who speak and write English as an additional language are sometimes worried about their language proficiency. They don’t need to be worried at all as everyone can improve on their language ability by practicing. Furthermore even students who speak English as their native language sometimes struggle with their writing. This presentation focuses on academic language. You are expected to employ academic language for completing the assessment tasks for this course. Academic language is different from language used for everyday communication. There are particular conventions that you are expected to employ in order to meet the requirements of academic writing.

**Slide 2: Becoming better writers.**

Writing is a difficult skill for everybody including those who have been doing it for years. You get better at writing the more you practise. Those who write well do so not because they are talented but because they work hard at improving their writing skills. Writing in English is even more difficult because English is a very complex language that has many different influences. Even native speakers find writing in English quite challenging. So, if English is not your first language and you are finding it difficult, it is quite understandable. What is important is your commitment to continuously show your instructors that you are trying to incorporate everything that you learn about academic writing and language to improve on your writing skills. As English language is a global language and is used in many corporate and educational settings, it is important to have good English literacy skills, especially for your future career, no matter which discipline you graduate from.

**Slide 3: Tips for better writing**

Some students think that in order to demonstrate that they are proficient, they need to use sophisticated terminology and vocabulary. This is okay if you know what they mean and how to use it correctly in your writing. However, sometimes these words can make reading difficult for the reader. You will not be penalised for using simple words where possible. It is also important to keep your sentences simple by not communicating too many ideas at one go. Not only is this confusing for the reader, you will also tend to make mistakes when you do this. All you have to ensure is to have a main verb that explains what is happening in every sentence and a main subject that explains who or what is doing the action. Do also remember to keep the subject of the sentence at the beginning with the main verb nearby. There is nothing worse than having to read half a paragraph before finding out what the writer is trying to communicate.

A simple technique to improve on your writing is to shorten your sentences. You would not be able to write good long sentences until you can write good short ones. Writing short sentences also reduces the mistakes that you may make. However, this is not to say that you should never write long sentences. You can do so once you become more confident and proficient in the language. It is also really important that you do not copy what you read from your readings and research. It is more important to write clearly and maintain formal language rather than trying to sound academic by copying other scholars. Remember many of these scholars are experts in their field and write in a particular style that is full of jargon and technical words. Although, it is commonly suggested that you use the passive form in academic writing, your discussion can become quite boring to the reader. The passive can also sometimes make writing sound very scientific. It is a good idea to use the active voice in your writing as well. You can use both the passive and active so that your discussion is engaging.

Finally, good writers constantly proofread and edit their work. They also get other people outside the course or program to read their drafts so that the errors are identified and can be corrected. You also cannot produce a good piece of writing at one go. Even good writers including your lecturers have to produce a few drafts before they are happy with their writing. Assignments that are full of errors and typos will demonstrate to your instructor that you have not put in the effort required to obtain good grades. On the next slide, you will see examples that relate to these tips.

**Slide 4: Tips for better writing: Examples**

On this slide, you can see examples of the tips highlighted in the previous slide. Do remember that in some courses such as LANG1054 which is intercultural communication, you are allowed to use first person pronoun. You may not be allowed to use this in other courses which would require you to use only third person pronoun. Always confirm with your instructors about this before you begin writing your assessment tasks.

**Slide 5: Sentence structure**

There are generally three types of sentences that you could write in your assessment tasks and they are simple, compound and complex sentences. On this slide you will see examples for all the three types of sentences. It is strongly suggested that if you are struggling with your writing skills, you begin writing simple sentences for the assessments in this study program. You can write as many simple sentences as you want as long as they are grammatically correct and easy to understand. The longer and more complex your sentences are, the more errors you tend to make. Your tutors will be happy as long as they can understand what you are trying to say even if it is done through simple sentences. Unless you are really proficient in academic writing, do not attempt to write sophisticated and complex sentences. The same goes for vocabulary as well. The rule is ‘keep it simple’. You can progress to more complex sentences once you are confident of writing them.

**Slide 6: Verb tenses**

In the English language, there are three main time references and they are the past, present and future. These time references will impact on the verbs that we use when writing. It is really important to know which time reference you are referring to before you begin writing. \*For instance, if you are discussing about the challenges associated with intercultural communication in the past, then you would use the past time reference. If you are discussing how intercultural communication plays a significant role in the different contexts today, then you would need to use the present time reference. If you are discussing what the implications of intercultural communication is for the future then you should use the future time reference. However, there are always exceptions to the rule in the English language. Use a good grammar text to learn more about this. Ensure that the subject agrees with the verb. If you are referring to one subject then the verb should be a singular verb and if you are referring to many subjects then you should use a plural verb. You would be able to do this if you write simple sentences.

**Slide 7: Writing sentences: readability**

Often your instructors complain that your assessment task is ‘unreadable’. Do you wonder what they mean? On this slide there is a list of reasons as to why your writing may be ‘unreadable’. Do take some time to go through the list and reflect on whether you have demonstrated any or all of this in your writing. In future try to be careful about repeating these mistakes in your writing tasks. You can refer to the text cited on this slide for more information on this.

Slide 8: Examples of unreadable text.

On this slide, you will see three examples of text that was taken from a student’s writing for an assessment task for intercultural communication. You will see that the style of writing for this task is different from those that you would demonstrate in other courses. The use of first person pronoun was allowed as it was a reflective essay. Your instructors may not want you to use first person pronoun when you are not writing a reflective essay. Now let’s look at the examples and identify why the instructor may have suggested that the discussion is unreadable. Can you identify some possible reasons for this?

In Example 1, although the message is clear, the subject is not mentioned until very much later in the discussion. The student refers to the ‘event’. It would have been a good idea to refer to the event at the beginning of the sentence. It would have also been a good idea to provide the reader with a context through a topic sentence that introduces the main idea of the paragraph. You would also notice that the sentence is very long with the student trying to communicate different ideas at the same time. There is also confusion with regards to the time reference. The student has used a present verb tense to refer to a past occurrence, i.e. ‘Traveling to Thailand last year’.

Were you able to identify why the second example was marked as unreadable? Similar to the first example, the sentences are very long. The student has not demonstrated academic language in their writing. In academic writing you are usually advised to use statements instead of questions. So the student could have written, ‘I was unclear as to why he was angry with me despite having just given him some tips’. The student has also tried to use vocabulary that is sophisticated without knowing the meaning and the context in which it is used. This comes across as confusing.

In the third example, there are particular aspects that creates problems for the reader. Like the previous example, the student has tried to use complex vocabulary. There are also errors in the use of pronouns. In the sentence, ‘in Hong Kong sometimes we eat in restaurant, it would changed some coins after the payment’, the reader does not know what ‘it’ refers to. The verb tense is also all wrong as the student moves from one time reference to another. In this instance, they are referring to an event that happened in the past but the student concurrently uses the present and past verb tense. On the next slide, you can see examples of how these texts could have been written more clearly.

It is possible that the student has thought about the event in their first language and has written using the language system that operates in their language. Although, it is alright to think and process something in your first language, it is important to be aware that the language system in English may not always be similar with your own. If you translate from your first language to English, be sure that you follow the rules that are specific to the English language such as those that have been specified in the earlier sections of this presentation.

**Slide 9: Examples of good writing**

On this slide you can see how the same texts written by the student can be revised to adhere to academic language conventions. In all the three examples you will notice that no significant changes have been made to the meaning. All that has been done is a context has been created at the start so that the reader can engage with the discussion without any problems. The subject has been referred to right at the beginning. The sentences have been broken into shorter ones. The verb tenses refer to the appropriate time references. The vocabulary that has been used in simple and clear. The pronouns are correctly used.

**Slide 10: References**

For more information on academic language, you can refer to the references cited on this slide or any other good grammar texts. You can also refer to the resources that are listed on this slide. These can be found on the Study Help webpage on the UniSA’s Student Engagement Unit website: http://w3.unisa.edu.au/study-skills/Assignment\_skills.html