IAP

Voice in Academic Writing

Learning Advisers
UniSA
In this workshop you will:

- explore the concept of ‘voice’ in academic writing
- Identify different voices in written examples
- complete practice activities which focus on developing your academic voice
What do we mean by ‘voice’?
Is society best served by a ‘user pays’ system of higher education?

• Tell a group your view.
There are several definitions of critical thinking. Halpern (1997. p.4) defines it as ‘the use of those cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome. It is used to describe thinking that is purposeful, reasoned and goal directed’. Ruggiero (1998) states that critical thinking involves problem solving and decision making.

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(adapted from Brick 2011, p. 92)
In your writing, you will have:

- Your own voice (expressing your ideas/thoughts/argument)
- Voices of others (sources)

You need to identify for the reader which voice belongs to who. This is done through in-text referencing.

If a voice is not referenced, the reader sees it as the voice of the writer (i.e. you).

(adapted from Brick 2011, p.98)
In-text referencing

In-text references may be ‘author prominent’, as in the previous example text:

Ruggiero (1998) states...

Or they may be ‘information prominent’:

There are several definitions of critical thinking. It has been defined as ‘the use of those cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome. It is used to describe thinking that is purposeful, reasoned and goal directed’ Halpern (1997, p.4). Another explanation is that critical thinking involves problem solving and decision making (Ruggiero 1998).

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Your choice of in-text reference type will depend on which aspect you wish to emphasise.
Developing your academic voice
Academic assignments require you to:
evaluate evidence, take a position on an issue and support your position. When you do this effectively, you use your academic ‘voice’ as well as the ‘voices’ of other authors.

It is important that you develop both:

- Your knowledge of the subject
- Your ability to use that knowledge in a debate with others (Brick 2011, p.104)
How do we develop a ‘position’?

You arrive at a position on a topic by:

• Understanding the main concepts involved
• Reading widely on the issue
• Critically evaluating the ideas of others on the topic. This could include:
  - pointing out problems with assumptions that underpin an argument or a conclusion
  - recognising how well-constructed arguments influence your own opinion on the topic (Davies 2011, p.123)
• Talking to others about the above

Your position on a topic may shift, change or refine as you read and research.
Your voice expresses your position

Key questions can help to keep you on track and make your position on the topic clear:

- What am I focussing on here? What am I talking about?
- Why am I focussing on this? What are my reasons for talking about this?
- How do I want to develop this discussion? What do I want to discuss, and in what order do I want to discuss these topics?
- What/so what? What are the main ideas I want to bring forward in my discussion and what are the implications around these main ideas

(Cresswell 2005, p. 111)
Reading critically

1. What is this document about?

2. Is it accurate? How do you know?

3. Who wrote it? Is the writer an authority in this field?

4. Is the writer trying to persuade you of a particular position?

5. Is this argument based on a broad or narrow view of the issue?

6. What evidence is offered to support the argument?

7. What hasn’t been included in the argument?
8. What would a totally opposite point of view look like?

9. Do you agree/disagree with the position presented by the writer?

10. How did you come to this view?

11. What do other writers have to say about this topic?

12. Does this text add anything ‘new’ to the topic?

13. Is this argument a significant or controversial debate in the discipline/field?

14. Is this document useful for your present research?
Reporting verbs

These are important in introducing the ideas of others into your writing and clarifying for the reader whose ‘voice’ they are reading.

Ruggiero (1998) states that critical thinking involves problem solving and decision making.

Your choice of verb depends on its meaning and what you want to convey about your attitude to the reported information.

What is the difference for the reader if the reporting verb ‘states’ is replaced as follows?:

Ruggiero (1998) suggests that critical thinking involves problem solving and decision making.

You can create variety in your writing by using a range of reporting verbs.

For more information on reporting verbs, see the L3 online resource Reporting the ideas of others.
Practice activities
Activity 1

Complete the activities to practise identifying different voices in a text.
One phenomenon that can impact greatly on the effectiveness of groups is that as group sizes increase there is a tendency for the effort put in by the group to be less than the average effort put in by individuals engaged on the same task separately (Gabrenya, Latane & Wang 1981; Albanese & Van Fleet 1985). The phenomenon has been described using various terms. Writers influenced by industrial economics describe it as the 'free-rider problem', where the collective nature of the 'contract' obscures the fact of one member failing to honour their part of the contract (Albanese & Van Fleet 1985, p230). Writers who are organisational psychologists tend to label the phenomenon as 'social loafing' and typically define it as "one where everyone puts in a little less" (Gabrenya, Latane & Wang 1981, p120). Whatever the terminology used to describe this phenomenon, it is one that is problematic for groups.

(Unilearning 2000)
Activity 2

Watch this short talk about ‘mono’ versus ‘multi’ tasking.

Should we forget multi-tasking? What is your view?
Language and learning resources

- **Resources**: online guides to assessment tasks and academic skills.

- **Workshops**: register for weekly small group sessions to assist with your study.

- **Initial 1:1 consultation**: book an initial consultation with a Language and Learning Advisor to find out more about our services.

- **ELSAT**: if you are concerned about your English language skills, take the ELSAT to see if you are eligible for further consultations with a Language and Learning Adviser and language feedback on 2 assignments.
Other resources

Examples showing different voices in academic writing and practice activities can be found at:

http://www.uefap.com/writing/writfram.htm
References


