

Learning, Teaching
and Student Engagement

English Skills

Writing and Reading

This module covers concepts such as

- Reading analytically to develop your skills as a writer
- Identifying some of the main features of academic writing
- Applying knowledge of the characteristics of academic writing to your own writing

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The Learning Centre
UNLOCK YOUR POTENTIAL

Read well to write well



In order to write well, you need to read well and focus on texts from the perspective of a writer.

Here are some questions to guide your reading so that you are developing **language skills** and **critical thinking skills** when you read, rather than simply reading to understand content. Look for patterns of language and vocabulary use as well as the key features of academic writing.

You can apply the following analytical questions to any text you read, including your own writing. Through focused reading, you will become more aware of the many elements of effective writing.

Analyse a written text by answering the following questions.

1. CITATION OR REFERENCE DETAILS

- Who** wrote the text? Most referencing systems only require surname and initials.
- When** was it published? Where? By whom?

2. STRUCTURE

- Approximately **how long** is the text?
- Is the text divided into **sections**?
- Are **headings** and sub-headings used?
- Is the information presented in **logical** order?

3. CONTENT OVERVIEW

- How can you gauge quickly what the text is about?
- Where will you find a **summary** of the main ideas or arguments?
- How does **paragraph structure** assist you with skim reading a text?

4. A BRIEF CRITICAL ANALYSIS

- What is the author's **purpose**? Is he/she well **qualified**?
- View the **reference list** and consider the number of references cited and whether they are current and scholarly.
- Are the author's claims in every paragraph supported by evidence, **rational**?

- d. Look for **in-text citations** and consider how well the author uses evidence from outside sources to support his/her arguments. Does **synthesis** sometimes occur? i.e. (that is) Does the author use multiple authors to support a point?

5. LANGUAGE ANALYSIS

5.1: VOCABULARY

- a. Note any **unfamiliar words**. Use the context to guess their meaning then verify with a dictionary. Check the pronunciation and usage as well as the meaning.
- b. Can you find any **collocations**? Collocations are words that are commonly grouped together, e.g. 'brief summary', 'broad range', 'business sector', and 'common characteristics'.
- c. Find examples of **linking/transition** words or phrases. Note how they make the writing coherent and easy to follow.

5.2: SENTENCE STRUCTURE

- a. Note the **word order** in sentences.
- b. Find a short, simple sentence. Identify the subject, **verb** (essential) and object.
- c. Find a longer sentence. How many verbs are used? How are the parts of the sentence connected with **linking words** and **punctuation**?

5.3: GRAMMAR

- a. Which **verb tenses** are used? Why?
- b. Is the **passive voice** used?
- c. Select a range of **nouns and pronouns**. Consider why they are in **singular or plural** form.
- d. Note how **articles** (a/an/the) are used or not used.
- e. Find some **prepositions** in context.

5.4: ACADEMIC STYLE

- a. Is the writing objective and **impersonal**? Does the author write in the third person? Is emotion expressed?
- b. Find words or phrases that **qualify** statements to make them more **precise**. e.g. **The majority of students at university in Australia** are conscientious.

What have you learnt?

Through your exploration of an academic text, you will have discovered that academic writing is generally **rational, logical, precise, qualified and impersonal**. Clear, well-punctuated sentences, well-structured paragraphs and effective textual organisation **make reading easy for the reader**. Language usage is complex in English and requires great attention to detail. With focused reading, you will develop your written language and academic literacy to become an effective writer. Good luck!