



**The Secret of Academic Writing:
A Guide for Reviewing, Analysing,
Conceptualising and Writing up**

What is an Academic Writing?

- Academic writing is 'structured research' written by 'scholars' for other scholars (with all university writers being 'scholars' in this context).
- Academic writing addresses topic-based 'research questions' of interest to anyone who is seeking factually-based, objectively-presented information on a particular topic.
- The objective of academic writing is the creation of '**new knowledge**' via (a) a review of *what is currently known about a given topic* as (b) the foundation for *the author's new views or perspectives on the topic*.

Method-Methodology

- **Method:** a way of proceedings or doing something, especially a systematic or regular one. Methods are specific techniques and tools for exploring, gathering and analysing information, for example observation, drawing, concept mapping, photography, video, audio, case study, visual diary, models, interviews, surveys and so on.
- **Methodology:** is the study of the system of methods and principles used in a particular discipline. Only through investigation and comparing different research approaches and the various methods used are we enabled to make an informed decision about how to proceed. The aim of the methodology is to help us understand, in the broadest possible terms, not the products of inquiry, but the process itself.

Reviewing-Analysing-Conceptualising- Writing

- The process of the development of the argument
- Literature Review/ Selecting key areas and concept/
Reviewing founding
- Analysing the quantitative/qualitative data,
theoretical
- Conceptualising the ideas it was collected in order to
produce an argument, interconnecting the concepts
to represent your argument: critical reflections
- Writing up: formulating a clear text flow. Mapping,
interconnecting and re-contextualising. Re-
evaluation/Rewriting.

Argument

- By developing convincing arguments, we can propose different views and **contribute to debate in our research context.**
- **Argument is a process of reasoning** in which we attempt: '...to influence someone's belief that what you are proposing is the case...Whichever way someone makes an argument they are attempting to convince others of the validity...of how they see the world and convince us that we should see it the way they do' (Hart, q988, pp.79-108)

Argument

- Stephen Toulmin (1958) developed a model of a structure of an argument, which has four components:

CLAIM: an arguable statement

EVIDENCE: data used to support the claim

WARRANT: an expectation that provides the link between the evidence and the claim

BACKING: context and hypothesis used to support the validity of the warrant and evidence

For Example

CLAIM: Art and Design is an important activity.

EVIDENCE: An analysis of the Higher education Statistic Agency data reveals a rapid increase in completed research for higher degrees in the creative arts and design.

WARRANT: Formal research in Art and Design should be encouraged.

BACKING: Formal research should be encouraged because it contributes to the rigorous investigation of practice encouraging new developments and new roles for practitioners.

For Example

- **CLAIM:** Through philosophy we might provide a more effective way of human-computer interaction
- **EVIDENCE:** Analysis of Heidegger's original text
- **WARRANT:** Heidegger's philosophical idea of invisible tool useful for applications of human-computer interaction
- **BACKING:** Critical discourse of people applied or misapplied Heidegger

Critical Thinking

- Critical thinking means thinking effectively and applying sound intellectual standards to your thinking.
- It involves 'meta-thinking' → thinking about your thinking /self-reflection
- It involves not jumping to conclusions too quickly and maintaining an open mind, considering all aspects of an issue before making up your mind.
- It involves maintaining some degree of distance in order to prevent personal bias or prejudice interfering with your reasoning.
- It encourages questioning, imagining, connecting, interpreting, applying.

Critical Skills

- **Being aware of the structure of argument** and the criteria of clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, and reason, you can begin to evaluate the significance and value of relevant materials that might form part of your context.
- Good practice is to **test your positioning** with deliberately taking a conflicting or different position in order to see things from another perspective. It can make us aware of the limits of our own knowledge and understanding. Try to outline the strengths and weaknesses of different positions in order to explain/justify/defend your preferred position.
- **Develop a conceptual framework/Conceptual map.** For example such a map about the topic research would be. This helps to produce an overview of the concept which can be followed by subject specific framework.
- **Visual Mapping/Conceptual Drawings Visualisations**

Research question

- The literature review should have provided you with an overview picture and an understanding of your particular research context- **a map of the world.**
- It should have enabled you to begin to locate your research proposal in relation to the context – a **'map of the city'**.
- The identification and evaluation of the most important research and practice in that context should enable you now to focus on a particular area – a **'map of the city'** – acknowledging what has already been achieved and what might still be explored and evaluated, and possibly improved upon.
- The identification of the specific research question is like a **'street map'** where your own house can clearly be seen.

Tautology

- This is the name for a particular fault in expression, the unnecessary duplication of an idea using different words. In the phrase: *the former musical glories of an earlier time*, *former* is not needed; it means 'of an earlier time'.
- In the phrase: *the circumstances surrounding her death*, the word *circumstances* already means *conditions surrounding*, so it should be followed simply by *of*.

- It is noticeable that many tautological expressions are clichés. They come ready made along tired old grooves of expression. The reader may well wonder whether tired expression means tired ideas.
- Some tautologies arise because the writer does not know the precise meaning of a word. An *innovation*, for example, is a 'new' idea or way of doing something, not just an idea or practice.
- It is quite easy to introduce tautologies into a piece of writing when you are searching among various similar phrases for a way to express an idea, so it is wise to look out for them when you are checking a piece of writing.

Formulating your Research Question

A meaningful question can be answered by research: non-meaningful question cannot.

Research question drives your research project.

Your Literature Review should enable you to address key questions crucial for the development of your research project proposal:

- Why your research needed and what evidence is there to support this?
- Who else in the field has addresses significant aspect of your research area?
- When (and possible where) was other relevant research carried out? How was that research carried out, and what are the implications of this for your methodology?
- What aspects remain unexplored or require further research?

Reading

- Reading at leisure for relaxation and pleasure is very different from reading for a Literature Review, rewarding though the outcome might be.
- Focused reading:
- obtain the reference/source material and don't forget to capture publication/output detail in your bibliography (RefWorks)
 - Try to get a quick overview of content and structure – look at the index/chapter/section headings
 - Keep your keyword/research description in your mind

Reading

- Scan read the introduction/abstract and the summary/conclusions
- Read more carefully the various sections that seem significant
- Use colour highlighters (by photocopied text), highlight keywords
- Extract key information
- While you are reading, take note of the quality of information. Check it against critical quality such as: clarity, accuracy, precision, depth, rigour, consistency, effective analysis and synthesis.

Reviewing

- The **Literature Review** should cover that work by others which provides a **basis and context for your research** either because you are using the findings to **support an argument** to extend something or because **you have identified a limitation** and will be pursuing studies to address it.

Analysing

- The Analysis is an constantly evolving process that does not finish with the initial writing up process. The reviewing and reevaluating will continue in your revision and rewriting process. It constantly changes your argument, shifting concepts and application around in your text.
- After the Literature Review you have to decide which concepts to use in order to articulate your argument.
- You have to select ideas, concepts which are meaningful to your subject with either critiquing them or applying them as supporting concepts.
- You have to add constantly new concepts and theories to your argument in order to produce a fluid argument and justify your argument.

Interpretation and Conceptualisation

- Your contribution to knowledge
- A novel perspective which is backed up with other scholarly work that support your argument or through a critical perspective that strength your argument.
- An interdisciplinary network of concept that produce a novel perspective on your subject
- You have to articulate your own application of such concept and why are they useful to your argument and creative practice

Critical Writing

- In relation to Literature Review, different styles of writing may need to be adopted at different stages.
- **Clear and Precise** descriptive summaries of sufficient depth about a key reference, using no emotive or value-laden language or jargon.
- A **clear description and evaluation** of the key arguments (applying the set of criteria previously outlined)
- The **use of accurate quotes** (where appropriate) to illustrate a point, with **precise references** as to source.

Guidelines for Clear Writing

- **Keep in Mind your Reader** : The reader needs to be able to grasp what you have done, what have you figured out, and to follow your argument without undue effort.
- **Use simple wording**
Short , familiar words are easier to understand than are technical terms which mean the same thing
- **Vary sentences lengths**
Short sentences are easier to understand than long ones. Long sentences overload the memory system. However some variation in sentences length is appropriate.

Guidelines for Clear Writing

- **Use structural devices to make the organisation clear**

Writers can use several devices to help clarify the structure and the sequences of text. Beginning, interim and end summaries can be helpful. Heading in the text label the sections so that writers and readers know where they are and where they are going. Headings help the reader to scan, select and retrieve material, as well as the recall it. Headings can be written in the form of statements or in the form of the questions. If the heading are in the form of questions then the text below must answer them, and this helps the reader to follow the argument.

- **Ask other people to read your drafts**

A 'fresh eye' is always useful. It is more likely that people who have not been involved in the writing process point out weaknesses in your argument: difficult to understand, not clear, sentence is too long, grammar...etc.

Writing

- Objective perspective
- Precise articulation in the text who is talking:
 1. It is your statement through the paper/text
 2. It is a description of another scholar's view
 3. It is a scholarly view on another scholar's work which you take on board or critique
 4. It is your application (or interpretation) of another scholarly work

Referencing

- An essential research skill is the accurate citing of references. This ensure that references are traceable, but equally important that research is attributed correctly to the rightful author/creator.
- Most Coomon: Harvard Referencing system or Chicago
- All media hast to be referenced according to the Harvard Standards: Text, images, motion pictures, sound, objects..etc.

References - Bibliography

- **References** at the end of text means a list of books which were referenced in the text.
- **Bibliography** provide an overview about all of the books that you have used to produce your paper. References are usually included in the Bibliography list.

What is the secret of academic writing?

- Clear, understandable text which flows like a 'Hollywood movie'
 - Consistency
- Critical Perspective well applied in the argument
 - Referencing
- The interconnection between practice and theory is well articulated
 - Identifying new knowledge

Harvard Referencing and Bibliography

Library Guide

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