Academic Writing Course

STUDY SKILLS IN ENGLISH

R.R. Jordan

THIRD EDITION

Academic Writing Course

STUDY SKILLS IN ENGLISH

Longman

R.R. Jordan

By the same author:
English for Academic Purposes: A guide and resource book for teachers-
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997

For BALEAP members

Contents

THIRD EDITION

Academic Writing Course

STUDY SKILLS IN ENGLISH

Longman

R.R. Jordan

By the same author:
English for Academic Purposes: A guide and resource book for teachers-
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997

For BALEAP members

Contents

Guide to Using the Book

The Aim of the Course	1 To enable non-native speakers of English who wish to follow a course in the medium of English at tertiary level to express themselves coherently in writing.

The Aim of the Course

1 To enable non-native speakers of English who wish to follow a course in the medium of English at tertiary level to express themselves coherently in writing.

2 To provide samples of academic writing and appropriate practice material for such students and also for those students who need to write essays or reports in English at an intermediate to advanced level.

3 To act as a revision course for students who have previously learned English as a foreign language at school and who probably learned English with the sentence as the grammatical unit. These students may now need to write in English for academic purposes.

4 To provide some practice in answering examination-type questions for public or internal exams.

The Organisation of the Course

Units

The book is divided into units that are self-contained but are linked in their progression through the overall needs of students who have to write in English for an academic purpose.

Many of the units focus on language functions that are used to express a particular notion or idea, e.g. description and definitions. The procedures of academic writing are also practised, e.g. paraphrasing and summarising. The most common genre (type of writing) that is practised is the essay. However, some practice is also provided in writing for exams, and information is given about writing research reports.

Written practice is given at different levels within each unit, mostly in three stages. All the units except the first conclude with a Structure and Vocabulary Aid to provide assistance with the words and grammatical constructions needed in that unit.

Key

The Key at the end of the book provides additional comments on some of the exercises and gives answers to many of the exercises.

Appendices

The Appendices act as a bank of reference material for both the student and the teacher. Appendix 1 provides an overview of some of the common types of language error and their causes. It also lists some useful books that give further practice in these areas.

Product and Process

Overall, the course provides practice in writing for a particular purpose: often models or examples are given from academic writing. In addition, the process of achieving the final product is considered. Students are encouraged to discuss and compare some of their writing, and to draft and check their writing carefully through proofreading. The teacher's use of a correcting code (Appendix 4) will help in this respect.

Using the Book

It is best if the units are worked through in order. However, this depends on the requirements of the students, who may need to practise the content of certain units before others (for example, Unit 14: Academic Style). The Structure and Vocabulary Aids should be referred to when necessary. Normally, the answers to each exercise should be checked in the Key before proceeding to the next exercise.

Suggestions for the Teacher

General

1 In a number of units there are blank-filling exercises to be done after reading a text. These can be used with some flexibility: students who have difficulty can look at the text again or at the same time as they are writing. Other students can do the exercises without referring back to the text. Advanced students can try to do the exercises before looking at the text. In other words, they will be trying to anticipate or predict the language needed from the context of the sentence.

2 Students may need to practise different kinds of academic writing (genres) in preparation for their studies of a particular subject. Units 14 and 16 will be particularly useful for this. In addition, it would be helpful if they could see examples of essays, reports, etc. of the type they will need to write in the future. Information about the requirements and expectations of subject departments would be particularly useful.

3 Some groups of students may be studying the same academic subject, e.g. one of the sciences or social sciences. If this is the case, then it would be helpful if you could devise some questions related to their specific subject at the end of Stage 3 for each unit. Similarly, some students may be at undergraduate level while others may be postgraduates. Consequently, practice at the appropriate level would be beneficial.

4 The questionnaires in Unit 17 and Appendix 5 may be photocopied for students to complete.

5 As a learning resource for students, any word processing package can help them to edit their own texts. There are also a range of websites which give access to learning and practice material (guidance, models, examples).

Examination Practice

Some students may need to practise writing answers for examination questions, either for internal or public exams. For such practice they need to be able to analyse the questions and decide what is needed. In addition, they need to write concisely, fluently and accurately. Unit 19 will be especially useful for this: its Glossary of Examination and Essay Questions will be generally useful for writing essays. Other units that are useful for exam practice are numbers 11–15.

One feature of writing for exams is the need to be able to write quickly – 'against the clock': for example, one essay-type question in one hour. Practice for this can be devised by giving a certain time limit in which to write some of the Stage 3 exercises, particularly those that apply to the students' own subject.

If a class is formed of students from the same subject area, it would be useful to obtain copies of past exam papers in their subject. The questions can be analysed with the students, noting the question-types that appear frequently. A question can be selected, discussed, the structure agreed upon and notes put on the board to help the students. They could then be given a time limit to write the answer. Later in the course, the notes on the board can be removed after discussion so that gradually help is reduced.

If the students are of mixed disciplines, they can be asked to provide questions about their own subjects. After suitable preparatory work they can attempt to write the answers under simulated exam conditions.

It is also possible to obtain information about public exams with examples of question papers. For example, *The IELTS handbook* is available from UCLES, Cambridge. Information about these exams, as well as other aspects of academic writing, is given in *English for Academic Purposes* (A guide and resource book for teachers) by R. R. Jordan, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Correcting Code

Sometimes when checking students' writing, it is necessary to write in the correct answers. However, some research has shown that if students are actively involved in trying to correct their own mistakes, with guidance, they are more likely to learn from them and not repeat them. One way to help in this respect is to use a code for correcting (see Appendix 4). With this approach, mistakes are not corrected but are indicated – both the type of mistake and its location.

Where a student's writing is 'good' or 'very good', it is very helpful to the student if you can indicate which parts are good and briefly explain why they are good. Without such comments, students may not repeat the good features in their next writing.

In addition to the Correcting Code, an appropriate Checklist for the type of writing (e.g. essay) can be constructed. If this is also circulated to students it will raise their awareness of what is needed and also remind them of what to check for. It can be used in conjunction with Unit 18. Examples of its content might be:

- Relevance of the answer to the question or topic
- Structure and organisation of the essay, and completeness of the writing

- Clear expression
- Coherence of argument
- Critical evaluation of points of view
- References to literature/research and use of quotations and bibliography
- Other details: grammar, spelling, punctuation

Discussion and Writing

Several discussion activities have been included, and students are encouraged to compare and discuss their answers with other students. The purpose is to raise the level of awareness of students of certain aspects of written English. In addition, the discussion is a useful prelude to writing discussion-type essays in which points of view need to be argued. It helps in the evaluation of differences between arguments. Such discussion also helps to develop critical thinking and self-confidence in expressing one's own views.
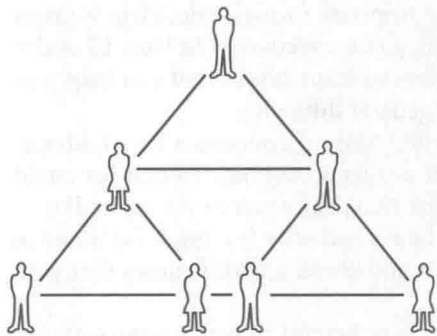
Pyramid Discussions

A Pyramid Discussion is an activity in which students are encouraged to take part in discussion by gradually increasing the size of the discussion group, starting with the individual, then building up to two students, then four, and then the whole group. The procedure is as follows:

1   First, students should individually select three items, as instructed, from the list given in the activity. The order of their choices is not important.

2   Then each student, in turn, should call out the numbers of his/her choices. Write these on the board for all to see.

e.g. student:	A	B	C	D etc.
choices:	12	3	4	1
	14	7	7	7
	15	10	12	10

3   After this, put the students in pairs so that they have, as far as possible, at least one choice in common (e.g. A and C, B and D above).

4   In pairs the students should then try to persuade each other to make changes in their choices so that at the end of a certain time limit (perhaps five minutes) they both agree on three choices. If necessary, they can compromise on new choices or 'trade-off' choices. The pairs' three choices are then noted on the board again.

5   Pairs should then be placed together who have at least one choice the same . . . and so the procedure continues until all of the class are involved.

6   If a pair or group finish their discussion before other groups, they can prepare arguments to defend their choices so that they are ready to meet another group.

7   While they are discussing, students will be practising the language of persuasion: agreement, disagreement, suggestion, qualification and compromise.

8 At the end of the activity is a suggestion that students can add some items of their own to the list. This may be done in pairs instead of, or in addition to, individually.

Pyramid Discussions are included in the following units: 2, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 15, 17 and 19. In addition, you could compose your own lists for extra topics, perhaps with the students suggesting items for the list (consisting of about 10–15 items). If more information is needed about Pyramid Discussions, see *ELT Journal*, Vol. 44 No. 1, January 1990, Oxford University Press ('Pyramid Discussions' – R. R. Jordan, pages 46–54).

Advice for the Student

With academic writing it is particularly important that you should check to ensure that it has the appropriate formal style. Help is given with this in Unit 14. General difficulties are covered in Unit 18 and Appendix 1. Appendix 1 also refers to some books that can help you with further practice in areas of general difficulty.

The Pyramid Discussion in Unit 2 Stage 3 contains a list of advice that should help to improve your academic writing. To that list could be added the need to write at least two drafts before you write the final version. Each draft should be revised after leaving it for a day or more so that you can think about and check any difficulties that you have.

If it is possible, you will find it very helpful to see examples of the type of writing that you are aiming to prepare for, for example, essays and reports. If the examples are good ones, they will show you the structure of the writing, the formal style, and the referencing system.

Unit 1   Structure and Cohesion

This unit is concerned with the general organisation of a piece of academic writing (e.g. a report, an essay, an assignment, a project), its structure and particularly the way in which the different parts are linked together. The plan below of a piece of writing, in this case an essay, will help to explain the overall structure.

Stage 1
Structure

STRUCTURE   CONTENT

1 *INTRODUCTION*
   The subject or topic. A statement of the
   problem, etc. Comments on the way it is to be
   treated.

                                                      sentences

                                                          ↓

                                                      paragraphs

2 *DEVELOPMENT*
   Presentation, analysis and discussion
   (involving comments on 'advantages' and
   'disadvantages').
   1 main idea
      (+ examples, details)
   2 main idea
      (+ examples, details)
   3 etc.

                                                      LANGUAGE
                                                      FUNCTIONS

3 *CONCLUSION*
   Perhaps a summary of the main points in 2.
   Own views/opinions and decisions.

Most pieces of formal writing are organised in a similar way – introduction; development of main ideas or arguments; conclusions. Each part of the writing will consist of language functions: particular uses and structures of the language organised according to the specific purpose that the writer has in mind in wishing to communicate ideas etc. to other people – describing, defining, exemplifying, classifying etc.

Each language function consists of sentences and/or paragraphs that are joined together or linked by connectives (words or phrases that indicate a logical relationship). These language functions will be examined in detail in the following units. In the rest of this unit we shall look at the linking of sentences by means of connectives.

Stage 2
Connectives

A piece of writing or text will often have the following structure:

BASIC CONNECTIVES: type
A – and
B – or
C – but

Introduction

A

supporting information

A

opposite arguments

C

main development

B

alternative proposals

A

Conclusion
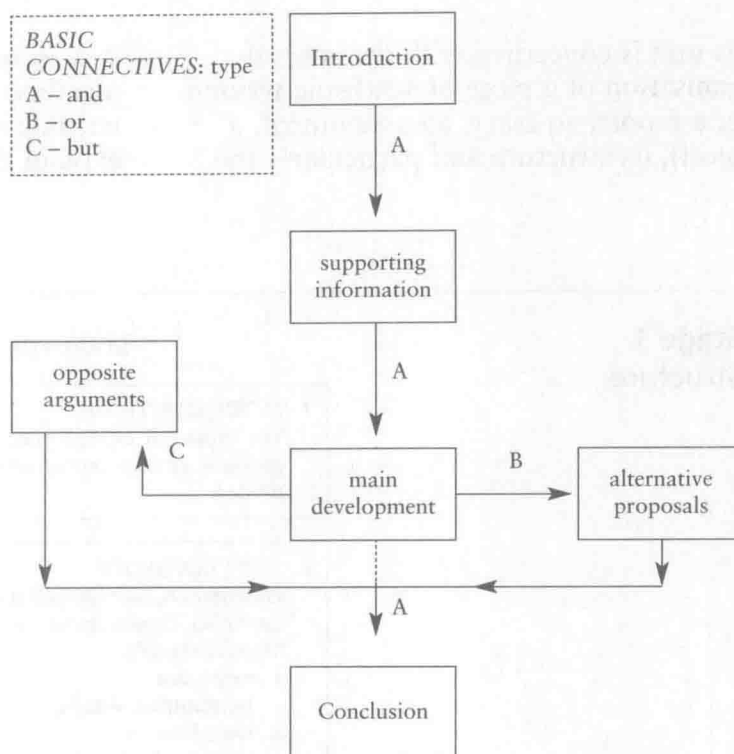
A The discussion, argument, or comment in the development of the topic may be very straightforward, in which case ideas will be added together one after the other. The basic connective *and* is used here. (A number of connectives have a similar or related meaning to *and*.)

B Sometimes the comments may be expressed in another way, or an alternative proposal may be made. This is represented by the basic connective *or*. (A number of other connectives have a similar meaning.) After the alternative has been considered, the main argument will continue.

C There are also occasions in arguments etc. when the opposite is considered or referred to. This is represented by the basic connective *but*. (There are also a number of other connectives with a similar meaning.) After the opposite or opposing view has been considered, the main argument is continued.

A list of the connectives divided into the main groups of *and*, *or*, *but* is contained in Appendix 2: Connectives.

1 'And' type: Connectives of Result (Type A)

Look at the following example:

| He passed his examinations; | *so,*
therefore,
as a result,
accordingly,
consequently,
thus,
hence, | he had some good
news to tell his
parents. |

Because he passed his examinations,

> **Note:** The connectives (in *italics*) join a cause ('he passed his examinations') with a result, effect or consequence ('he had some good news to tell his parents').

Add a second sentence. Use a suitable connective from the list above, and a result, effect or consequence from the list below.

a Many students find it difficult to read newspapers in English . . . _____

_____

b Most students living abroad are interested in news of their own country . . . _____

_____

c When a student goes abroad to study he/she may have to complete about twelve different forms . . . _____

Result, Effect or Consequence:

. . . British news is found to be of most interest.

. . . they usually read the international news first in the newspapers.

. . . an average of five books per month are read.

. . . not many read one regularly.

. . . it is useful to be able to answer questions briefly.

Complete the following by adding a suitable ending of your own.

d The lecture was very difficult to understand. Consequently,

_____

e Carlos was only able to read very slowly in English. Therefore,

_____

2 'Or' type: Connectives of Reformulation (Type B)

Look at the following example:

| He said that he had kept the library book for several years. | *In other words*
To put it more simply,
It would be better to say | he had stolen it. |

> **Note:** The connectives (in *italics*) introduce a reformulation of what has come before. The reformulation appears in different words and is used to make the idea clearer or to explain or modify it.

Add a second sentence. Use a suitable connective from the list above, and an appropriate reformulation from the list below.

a   Maria is rather slow at learning . . . _____

_____

b   Helen finds languages quite easy . . . _____

_____

c   Anna speaks English like a native-speaker . . . _____

_____

Reformulation:

. . . she speaks it excellently.
. . . she speaks slowly.
. . . she is taking a long time to improve her English.
. . . she has little difficulty in learning English.
. . . she speaks it with great difficulty.

Complete the following by adding a suitable ending of your own.

d   Margaret is bilingual. In other words, _____

_____

e   Some people say that if you are good at music you will also be good at learning languages. In other words, _____

_____

3   'But' type: Connectives of Concession (Type C)

Look at the following example:

| The time available for discussion was very limited. | *However,*
Nevertheless,
Nonetheless,
Yet,
In spite of that,
All the same, | it was still possible to produce some interesting arguments. |

> **Note:**   The connectives (in *italics*) indicate the surprising nature of what follows in view of what was said before; a kind of contrast is indicated.

Add a second sentence. Use a suitable connective from the list above, and a concession (or contrast) from the list below.

a   Some of the examination questions were very difficult . . .

_____

_____

b   There was only limited money available for research . . .

_____

_____

c   The project was very complicated . . . _____

_____

Concession:

... Dimitrios was not able to do it.
... Juan succeeded in completing it in time.
... Abdul was able to obtain a grant.
... Oscar did not manage to complete them.
... Ali managed to answer them satisfactorily.

Complete the following by adding a suitable ending of your own.

d It seemed likely that he would fail the test. However,

_____

e There were a number of good reasons why he should not finish the experiment. Nevertheless, _____

_____

Stage 3
Paragraphs

It is essential to divide your writing into paragraphs. A paragraph normally contains several sentences but they are all concerned with the theme contained in the topic or key sentence (i.e. the main sentence). The key sentence is usually the first one, which contains the main idea or topic. The other sentences support it by adding further information or examples. A paragraph is self-contained but should link logically with the previous and following paragraphs so that the flow and cohesion of the writing is maintained.

1 Look at the paragraph at the end of Stage 1. Which is the key sentence?

2 The following sentences are in mixed order. To form a paragraph they need to be reorganised. Underline the key sentence and put the sentences in the correct order by numbering them 1–5.

a It is mainly formal, impersonal and objective.

b In most of these the writer is expected to include references to other writing or research.

c Academic writing is a particular kind of writing that can be recognised by its style.

d These include essays, research reports and articles, case studies, surveys, dissertations, theses, and examination papers.

e Other distinctive features will depend upon the specific types of academic writing.

Note: Paragraphs are either indented from the left margin (i.e. they start further in from the left) or a line of space is left at the end of a paragraph and the next paragraph is started on the left margin. This makes it easier for the reader to read a text.