

Academic English Writing Skills

Essays and Dissertations

学术英语写作技巧

——英语论文与毕业论文写作

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前 言

随着我国高等教育的发展和教学改革不断深入，高校更加重视学生的创新思维，强调学生的实际技能和研究方法的培养。论文写作已经成为大学本科生、研究生学习的重要环节。本科生的学年论文、毕业论文、研究生的硕士、博士论文等已成为考核学生学习的重要依据。除英语专业的本科生和研究生需用英语写论文外，在我国，也有越来越多的其他学科，尤其是人文、社会科学类的学生，或是直接用英语撰写毕业论文，或是在毕业后用英语发表学术论文。毕业论文写作已成为使学生初步接触学术论文写作的重要步骤。

学术论文强调解说、评议、辨析及论证与本专业学科相关的现象和问题。因此，学术论文的写作既基于又高于一般文章的写作要求。一般认为，学术写作除了体现作者扎实的基本知识、基本写作技巧和表达能力外，还更应显示作者的学术水平、理论水平、逻辑思维能力、辩论推理才智等。学术论文可以说是学术水平最直接的反映。学术论文写作与一般作文不同，除应有创新的观点、充分的论证、流畅的文笔和严谨的文章结构外，还得有符合学术要求的方法与规范，特别是直接用外语撰写论文就更应该符合国际通用的学术规范。

笔者在英国伦敦布鲁内尔大学学习期间，目睹了许多母语为非英语的学生撰写毕业论文时的艰难。他们虽都通过了雅思或托福考试，但因为不了解英文学术论文写作的规范与要求，而不得不雇请英语为本族语的学生帮忙修改论文，出资不菲。

优秀的论文应论点正确，论证充分，有理有据，分析中肯扼要，结构严谨，语言表达流畅，通顺易懂。因此，毕业论文写作是目前高等院校英语系给毕业生开设的一门重要课程，目的在于提高学生的写作理论水平和了解、掌握学术论文写作的规范与要求，增强他们的研究、分析和总结问题的能力。

本书对论文写作的整个过程作了较详尽的解说和阐述，其中包括论文的组织结构，收集资料，选题定题，开头、正文、结尾部分的内容组织和写作技巧，文献引用的方法和规则，摘要、开题报告、致谢的行文等，对毕业论文写作的每一步都给予了规则、技巧与方法的指导，实用性强。采用理论联系实际，方法联系实例，力求使论文写作的每一步都阐释的通俗具体，辅以可资借鉴模仿的句型、表达式和符合学术规范与要求的样文，有较强的可操作性。本书融知识性、针对性、实用性、可读性于一体，既可用做教材，也可用做学生的自学参考书，同时也为有志于到国外学习深造的学生助一臂之力。

本书的样文及范例大都直接选自国际学术期刊和论文集，也选录了部分国内外学生的毕业论文，供学生学习和了解学术论文及毕业论文的文体特点和行文格式要求。

本书配有光盘一套。内容包括：学生毕业论文点评、国际学术会议论文宣读实况录像等，旨在提供更多的学术论文范例和样本，可供教师上课使用，也可供学生课后自学，充分体现立体教学的特点。

本书承美籍教师 Brian Nealon 悉心审校，纠正了不少错误，尤其是语言错误。相信书中一定仍有瑕疵，乞盼读者批评指出。

纪蓉琴

2004.8. 于南昌

致 谢

本书最初形成于 2003 年，在 2004 届毕业生中使用。此间，我的同事和学生们提出了许多宝贵意见，为它的正式出版打下了良好的基础。在此特别感谢这个年级的学生和提出建议的教师，感谢他们的学习热情和专研精神及坦率中肯的批评和意见。他们提出的建议以及使用本教材后的体会，已经成为新教材的组成部分。学生们的优秀习作和典型错误，也大大丰富了本书的内容。

本书承蒙美籍外教 Brian Nealon 仔细审读，纠正了不少语言和结构上的错误。在此特别致谢。

最后也要特别感谢国内外同行前辈在这个领域做出的贡献和努力。教材最后列出的书目只是编者使用的参考书的一部分。本书选用了这些参考书中的一些内容，同时也采用了大量国内外学术期刊中的一些文章和段落作为样例和范文（已在文中列明出处），在这里一并表示感谢。

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Introduction

Topic Highlights

- 1. Definitions**
- 2. Language style**
- 3. Specific Expectations about Essays**
 - **Relevant to Set Topic**
 - **Making Use of Sources**
 - **A Reasoned Argument**
 - **Presentation**

Tasks

Theme Presentation

As a university student, you are required to do much of your thinking through writing. You are inevitably required to produce a considerable number of formal essays during your study. This will involve a commitment on your part of time, energy and mental effort. As you will soon find out, essay writing is hard work—and it does not get any easier as you advance in your studies. Many students, however experienced, find essay writing difficult. While this may seem a depressing outlook, it is realistic. Certainly you will, with time and experience, become more proficient in such skills as interpreting topics, handling research and

sources, and mastering academic language and presentation. There is, of course, no guaranteed formula for writing a good essay, no absolute method. However, certain techniques and skills, combined with practice, will increase your confidence and skill, thereby improving the quality and effectiveness of your writing.



1. 1 Definitions

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An essay is a series of related paragraphs that examines a single topic from the writer's viewpoint. It mixes fact with imagination, knowledge with feeling, but never giving itself over wholly to one or the other. Its purpose is always the same: to express an opinion. Essays will differ in quality and in kind, in length, in style, in subject. They will range from the very simple to the exceedingly complex. Essays appear in newspapers, magazines, professional journals, and collection of nonfiction writing. Editorials, book and movie reviews, daily column articles on travel, and short nonfiction composition that explores a single topic and expresses a personal point or view on that topic can be called an essay.

A dissertation or thesis paper is an essay of other form. It is usually written and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of BA or Bsc, or MA, Msc or Ph. D in a specific discipline.

A dissertation paper takes a definite stand on an issue. A dissertation is a proposition or point of view that the writer or speaker is willing to argue against or defend. A paper that is used to argue for ratification of a certain event would therefore be a dissertation paper. Writing dissertation paper requires the writer to exercise judgment, evaluate evidence, and construct a logical argument. In general, a dissertation is a lengthy, formal treatise, especially one written by a candidate for the bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree at a university.

Essays as well as dissertations are increasingly important forms of assessment in higher education today, a fact that causes poor writers a great deal of anxiety and distress. Yet essay writing is simply a skill to be

learned, like any other. Anyone can learn to express himself coherently and unambiguously through a systematic skill study.



1. 2 Characteristics of Academic Essays

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Most essays in the humanities and social sciences share certain general characteristics. An essay explores a single topic and expresses a personal point of view on the consistent research of that topic and the descriptive account of it; it belongs to the category of academic or research paper—to simplify, we will identify such an essay as a paper. Among the several varieties of papers are the course paper, term paper, and the extended paper (the graduate thesis and dissertation fall under this designation). All such papers are usually intended for publication. Thus, good papers must be professional and scholarly, original, authentic and scientific.

Professional and Scholarly

When we say papers should be professional and scholarly, we mean they ought to shed new light on subjects in a relevant field of academic inquiry. Papers are not merely meant to explain or describe a process or event, although this would be a common demand for a school essay. Rather, they are required to combine description with analysis or argumentation. They deal with the study of some objective facts or problems, and the conclusion that is drawn should be based on relevant data, not on personal likes and dislikes. This is particularly important in any kind of inquiry, and it should not matter who is conducting the experiment or investigation. Being impersonal and free from emotional factors is one of the important features of professional writing. The need to be formal comes from the fact that science reflects objective and empirical research facts, and is free from bias and prejudice. The need for objectivity becomes a matter of special concern whenever a research or an investigation touches upon human actions or attitudes. The focus of

professional writing is upon the data and upon the analysis of the data. Such characteristics are often evidenced in the titles of essays:

“On How to Translate Chinese Idioms about Animals into English”

“How the Crisis Changed Asia and How It Didn’t”

“Evaluation in the Reporting Verbs Used in Academic Paper”

All these titles point to the studies of English and Economics as their relevant academic topics.

In some cases, the subject matter of a discourse restricts the language used so that it becomes fully comprehensible only to people familiar with that particular topic or specialization.

Original, Authentic and Scientific

Academic papers are written after a large amount of reading, referencing, and analyzing on a particular subject or field. The point of the paper is formulated by gathering and utilizing data which involves the use of appropriate facts and examples, and drafting an authentic conclusion. It is not just imagination, but highly mental laboring and logical reasoning. Successful essays are the result of careful observation and analysis of new information or viewpoints in the academic field. In other words, the writer of an excellent paper explores and explains what others have missed. This is the primary task of academic research: to shed light on and bring new ideas to the field of inquiry. Papers must not only be reliable, but also scientific and original as well, as the following paper topic illustrates:

If you had to devise a new artificial language, which could be learnt ‘easily’, which word classes and which syntactic relations would you consider as absolutely indispensable?

This topic does not require the writer to explain definitively the nature of freedom or to develop a total language system. Rather, it suggests the examination of various aspects of the problem, selection of a

suitable approach, and development of the idea according to a clear set of criteria.



1. 3 Language Style

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The language style of essay writing can be categorized as academic. The academic writing style differs significantly from the styles of novels, newspaper articles and everyday written communication. Despite the fact that different academic writers have their own preferences in the choice of essay structures, sentence patterns, and words, they mostly observe the following six distinguishing features:

- ❖ Formal
- ❖ Objective
- ❖ Concise
- ❖ Varied
- ❖ Cautious and tentative
- ❖ Well-linked and connected

Academic style is best evidenced in its grammar and choice of words. Chapter 13 in this book offers a detailed examination on this topic.



1. 4 Specific Expectations about Essays

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What makes a ‘good’ essay? There are four major areas of performance about which academics hold clear expectations.

1.) Relevant to Set Topic

It is expected that essays should be clearly focused on the set topic and will deal fully with its central concerns. This can be realized by a full understanding of a general theme, concept or area of material.

- a.) The capacity to handle this general concept for a particular

purpose.

b.) The ability to relate general theory to specific examples.

In essay writing, you are required to read and think your way towards a considered judgment about a complex matter. You may be required to use both original materials (primary sources) and other writer's interpretations of these materials (secondary sources). The first should provide the basis for your thinking. The second may suggest starting points for critical analysis. In practice, you will be expected to:

- Recognize the assumptions and implications underlying the actual wording of the topic and take account of them in the course of your essay.
- Handle the topic and its key terms within the limits of the course and discipline being studied. (This can be a complex matter, as it requires you to distinguish clearly between different uses of the same terms. For example: Consider the ways in which you would need to interpret the term 'development' in economics and psychology essay topics.)
- Focus consistently on the key ideas and terms throughout your essay.
- Cover all the parts of the set topic. Some topics will include a number of sub-topics or sub-questions related to the main theme.

2.) Making Use of Sources

It is expected that essays will be the result of wide and critical reading.

At the university level, most topics on which you are asked to write have more reading matter available than you can possibly get through. You can tackle the daunting task of narrowing the amount of reading by following these guidelines:

- a.) Read with a questioning mind. Do not accept that something is true simply because it is published or on the Internet. Do not expect that there is any single correct answer to complex questions.

- b.) Read in order to understand both the meaning of each individual sentence and its relationship to the developing structure of the argument.
- c.) Evaluate continuously what you are reading. First, you will need to test the opinions and judgments of the writer against the evidence he or she provides, and against the opinions and judgments of other writers—and maybe against your own experience. Second, you must decide whether this material is relevant to the purposes of your essay.

3.) A Reasoned Argument

It is expected that essays should present a reasoned argument.

In the course of your reading and research for an essay, you will collect a substantial amount of material. Facts, ideas, opinions, definitions, quantitative data, quotations, etc.—these become the raw material on which your thinking and your essay are based. They have little significance in themselves. They only assume significance when you use them to develop a systematic point of view or argument.

The term ‘argument’ is used in a special sense in relation to academic essays. It does not mean that you must necessarily ‘take sides’ or present only one point of view. Rather it means that you should adequately explore the possible evidence. Key terms and concepts should be defined, especially if they are complex or otherwise require explanation, and general statements should be supported by evidence drawn from relevant sources. The material you gather should be organized with an eye toward your conclusion.

You can realize these aims by following these steps:

- a.) Select points which are directly relevant to the topic and argument, discarding those which may have seemed relevant when the ideas were still developing.
- b.) Structure the material so that the main ideas are presented logically and coherently, i.e. each idea must fit reasonably with that which precedes it and that which follows, and the ideas taken together

must lead consistently to the overall conclusion.

- c.) Ensure that each section of the argument is internally consistent, with all evidence, examples, and quotations clearly extending the central idea being developed.
- d.) Take into account alternative points of view or interpretations of the materials being used.

4.) Presentation

Essays should be competently presented.

In the final version of the essay, special attention should be paid to the formal presentation of the material. There are two levels for the presentation of essays to be competent:

- a.) the surface level of grammar, spelling, typing, referencing, and use of quotations, etc.
- b.) the appropriateness of the writing style to the task.

This can be realized through

- a.) Adopt a tone and style which are appropriate to academic writing in general and to the special demands of the discipline. Use the necessary specialist terminology accurately.
- b.) Use the correct format for quotations.
- c.) Follow the form of referencing and bibliographic citation which is standard for the discipline.
- d.) Present graphic and numerical data accurately and economically.
- e.) Edit the essays carefully for errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation, and for precision in choice of words and expression of ideas.

Thus, the overall aim of this course is to ensure that you feel confident in coping with the extended written work that will be assigned to you at the end of your university study.

Combining the knowledge and skills from your previous academic experience with the work you do in this course will enable you to utilize

effectively the facilities available to you when writing an informed piece of work. It is hoped that by the time you have completed this course, you will have a sufficient grasp of all the skills needed to write a long academic essay in English.