**Academic Writing**

Writing is a skill that is required in many contexts throughout life. For instance, you can write an email to a friend or reflect on what happened during the day in your personal diary. In these kinds of interpersonal settings (or intrapersonal in the case of a diary record), the aim may be to communicate the events that have happened in your life to someone close to you, or to yourself. Opportunities abound for personal reflection. It is expected that in writing about these life events, you will include your personal judgements and evaluations, which may be measured by your feelings and thoughts. The personal stories you write in a diary or email to friends can be written down at the moment they enter your mind. There is no need to follow a structure. Similarly, another feature of writing in personal contexts is that it is typically informal, so there is no need to adhere to structures of punctuation or grammar (although your reader may be quite appreciative if you do so). In these settings, it is perfectly acceptable to deploy colloquialisms, casual expressions, and abbreviations, like “that’s cool”, “by the way…”, “Palmy”, “b4”, and “thru”.

In contrast, academic writing in simple terms is the writing in an academic context following some stylistic rules and guidelines. It does many of the things that personal writing does not. Firstly, some kind of structure is required, such as a beginning, middle, and end. This simple structure is typical of an essay format, as well as other assignment writing tasks, which may not have a clearly articulated structure. In the case of an essay, the introductory paragraph informs the reader about the nature of the topic, which is discussed and evaluated in the middle of the essay, also referred to as the body. The introduction may also summarise very succinctly, in a sentence or two, your position on the issue, which is then elaborated on at length in the series of paragraphs that make up the essay’s body. Lastly, the end paragraph constitutes a conclusion in which you may summarise the overall points made. The concluding paragraph is also a good point at which to move the essay forward to touch on implications or future advancements surrounding the issues addressed. Another type of structure, common in university assignments is that of a report, often organised around the identification of problems or difficulties and corresponding solutions. Unlike most essays, a report is divided according to clearly labelled sections, such as “Introduction”, “Discussion”, “Conclusions”, and “Recommendations”. – Further, unlike an essay, reports allow for bulleted points with respect to the Conclusions and Recommendations sections. Consequently, in briefly considering the formats expected of typical university assignments, it is clear that they do follow a formal structure, which is often less clearly demarcated, if at all, in personal writing contexts.

A second difference between academic writing and other writing genres is based on the citation of published authors. If you make judgements about something in academic writing, there is an expectation that you will support your opinion by linking it to what a published author has previously written about the issue. Indeed, citing the work of other authors is central to academic writing because it shows you have read the literature, understood the ideas, and have integrated these issues and varying perspectives into the assignment task. The importance placed on referring to other authors in your work can be reflected in the elaborate referencing conventions that have been created within different disciplines, such as APA (American Psychological Association) referencing, which is used in psychology, education, some social sciences, as well as for business.

Thirdly, in academic writing you should always follow rules of punctuation and grammar, especially as the end-user or consumer of your writing, unlike a friend, is likely to be very different from you and will not always know to what you are referring. Hence, it is vital that you are clear. Punctuation as well as the conventions of grammar are universally known systems that maintain clarity and avoid ambiguity in expression.

Interestingly though, there are other situations where you may find yourself adhering to some of the principles underlying academic writing. One example is writing a covering letter for an employment position, or, even, taking minutes in a meeting. On the other hand, minute-taking may focus more on brief note-taking as opposed to fully constructed sentences furnished with marks of punctuation. Nevertheless, in a covering letter it would be unwise to use colloquialisms for a potential employer to read.

In academic writing, depending on the discipline of our study, we will need to learn specific jargon. If we specialize in just one discipline, then we can focus on mastering the vocabulary for that niche. If we want to expand to other disciplines, then we will have to expand our vocabulary even more.

Traditionally, academic topics have focused on abstract things, like ideas and concepts, which cannot, necessarily, be given in a concrete or physical form. Hence, academic writing is often more likely to focus on abstract processes and relationships. Yet, despite the abstract, non-material structure of some academic topics, you may be able to borrow concrete and physically oriented words to explain these abstract ideas and the relationships between them.

Typically, academic writing requires you to clearly describe abstract forms and their component parts, their links to other abstract forms, as well as where they are positioned in relation to a general, overall system. Even if you are dealing with a practically oriented topic like economics, computer science, rehabilitation, nursing, or teaching, the academic practice of learning about these things will likely require you to delve into theories, philosophies, concepts, and other abstract ideas that underlie the practical nature of the activities concerned. Therefore, the very nature of academic writing is also different from many practically-oriented or socially oriented writing tasks.

To summarise, academic writing is a special genre of writing that prescribes its own set of rules and practices. 1. These rules and practices may be organised around a formal order or structure in which to present ideas, in addition to ensuring that ideas are supported by author citations in the literature. 2. Further, academic writing adheres to traditional conventions of punctuation, grammar, and spelling. 3. Finally, in contrast to many other personal writing contexts, academic writing is different because it deals with the underlying theories and causes governing processes and practices in everyday life, as well as exploring alternative explanations for these events.