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Tips on Academic Writing

Key Features of Academic Writing

Academic writing is a specific way of expressing one's work. There is usually a certain layout which has to be followed. There can be some minor variations depending on the type of writing required - whether it is a report, essay etc.

Nevertheless, most academic writing will still follow the same overall structure:

- A beginning (The Introduction)
- The Middle (Main Body)
- An End (Conclusion)

and the key features of academic writing are as stated below:

The introduction gives a brief outline of what the writing is about - introduce the main argument/idea, for example, just as you would introduce yourself to someone at a meeting or a function, giving a bit of a background about yourself – what you have done in terms of work, or courses that you may pursued, and perhaps even what your future plans are. The introduction **will highlight the issues** that will be discussed and **give background information on the topic concerned**. Also, it will **give details of the framework** within which the writing will be done. The Introduction gives an account of what will be covered in your work and how you plan to address the question asked in your assignment.

In the main body each point that is presented, should be explored and developed. These points must be set out in a logical order, to make it easier for the lecturer/marker to follow and understand. Each point that is presented should be supported with evidence. Always express your own viewpoint and explain why you agree or disagree with whatever has been said and written. Critical thinking and evaluation are extremely important when writing your work.

The conclusion brings together the main points and summarises them. You can make recommendations and suggest solutions, wherever possible, to the problems and points discussed. If probable give clear examples of what can be done to resolve the problems discussed. It may also identify any gaps or weaknesses in the arguments or ideas presented, and can recommend further research or investigation

where appropriate. It should also mention the limitations that may have been encountered whilst writing the piece of work and any difficulties faced which relate to the topic.

Academic writing is usually written in the third person. Avoid using 'I' and 'You'.

EXAMPLES:

'Smith argued that strategy is dependent on strong leadership and future planning....'.

It was noted that

It has become apparent that staff appraisal is a key feature of human resource management.....

Introduction

A good introduction should:

- Define the topic being discussed
- Give an account of your objectives
- State what the limitations were when writing the assignment
- State what the differing viewpoints are on the subject
- Give a justification for dealing with the subject

The Structure of the Main Body of an Assignment

- The structure of the main body of an assignment is dictated by at least two factors:
- The **title and wording** of the assignment – what exactly is the topic about and what are the points that need to be discussed/covered
- The **statement of intent that you write** in the introduction, based on the title. You will explain how you will approach the topic and what you intend to do

- Once you have dealt with the above two elements, the main body of the assignment probably then serves to do at least two things:
- **Demonstrate** your knowledge of the topic, by including relevant evidence and clearly indicating that you have grasped and understood the topic
- **Scrutinise and weigh up** the evidence you have gathered and critically analyse and state your own opinions about the topic. Also, state whether you agree or disagree with what has been written on the subject and give an explanation/reason for doing so.

List of Points

In order to select the main points that you wish to include in your work, always consider if what you have selected does:

- Contribute to answering the question. Are the points relevant on the whole to your argument?
- If you are not sure what your points are that you wish to make, examine your topic, and then, break it down into a sequence of questions that need to be answered in order **to answer the main question**
- Think about what information your lecturer/marker will need to know, and the order in which they will need to know it.

Facts, Evidence and Data that you have collected should be linked in a logical order and this must be demonstrated by:

- Providing evidence for each of the main points you are making. You will need to be careful about the type and amount of evidence you incorporate into your assignments, always keeping in mind the word count. You must **NOT EXCEED** the word count, as you will **not get any extra marks** for writing longer assignments
- When selecting what information you use to support/validate your claims, you must evaluate that information, as not everything you find will be of high quality. Always use information that is valid and has been extracted from heavyweight resources
- Find high quality, academic information, from credible sources such as articles in peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, government reports, statistical data, articles extracted from reputable newspapers, books both

electronic and in hard copy, country and industry profiles (if required), and online resources

- In your writing, there are a number of ways that you can include the work of others into your own work, and **still express your own opinion** and make your ideas clear. **Always cite all your references accurately.** Most importantly always ensure that you do not **plagiarise the work of others** as this is deemed 'Unfair Practice' and is **NOT ACCEPTABLE under any circumstances.** Express your own opinion about any argument that you present in your assignment. Explain you why agree or disagree with statements made by others. Analyse their statements.

Important points in your Assignment

To help you put your points in a logical order, try to classify them into groups. These groups will broadly fit into an overall pattern, such as for and against, by different schools of thought or approach. There is not just one way to approach this, you will need to decide what is most appropriate for your purpose.

Put your groups, and the points within your groups, into an order

- Think about the sequence of information that the lecturer/marker will need to follow in order to make sense of the topic and/or your proposal or argument
- Present your points in a manner that make sense
- Most writing requires several drafts and revisions in order to improve clarity and structure – Do not think that the first draft will suffice. Keep improving your work prior to submission
- Always proofread your work and ensure that it is grammatically correct. Good presentation is very important.

Do not paraphrase or copy the work of others. Always cite your references throughout your work. Do not plagiarise.

The most important voice to get across in your writing is your own; it is how you can show the lecturer/marker what you are thinking, what your views are and how you have engaged critically with the topic being discussed. Be confident and express your own opinions and argument.

You may be asked to Discuss, Evaluate, Consider, Interpret, Comment, Assess, Express, Explain.....

If you see any of these terms in your assignment question you are expected to identify and explain the main features of the topic under discussion, including any main theories, ideas, models, or practices reinforcing the topic. If applicable, you would be expected to write about the advantages and disadvantages of any counter-arguments and to link up the different ideas that you have written about.

You may be asked to Analyse, Criticise

This involves a detailed examination of the topic in question. This could include explaining one or more of the origins, structure, organisation or development of the topic in question, and the positive and negative features of it.

You may be asked to Compare and Contrast, Distinguish between.....

This entails a close study of the differences between one thing or situation and another. You would need to identify the structure and features of one and make comparisons with another. If relevant to the assignment topic, you may be required to make a judgement on which is more suitable/or relevant for the situation in question.

Express your viewpoint

When writing your assignment express your viewpoint, and answer the question that has been set by using evidence. Examine what others have stated about the topic. Support your work with evidence to prove a point. Argue your case but be consistent and do not lose focus. Always include information which is directly relevant to your assignment question.

Logical structure of your argument

Always remain logical when writing an assignment, the aim being that, the lecturer/marker will look for your answers when presenting your argument. When presenting an argument always include both sides of the debate whether you agree or disagree about something that you present, and critically analyse and evaluate whatever you present. When presenting an argument look at the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence collected and comment on these with clarity. This will show that you understand the topic. Quite possibly, your personal argument will have strengths and weaknesses, but be confident, and express your opinion. Be accepting of the fact that, at times your argument may have weaknesses.

The Lecturer/marker is looking to gauge your knowledge about the topic, have you understood the question asked, does it become apparent to them that you have grasped what you have read/researched, judging by the examples that you give in your work. Also, in your analysis, are you able to break down what you have read into concise component parts which will demonstrate your clarity of thought.

When concluding your assignment weigh the evidence that you have collected and demonstrate how certain ideas are better than others. It is important to show where you stand as far as your thoughts are concerned. Very importantly demonstrate that you are an independent thinker with views of your own.