

Strategies for Developing English Academic Writing Skills*

Joseph Mallia

Centre for English and Foundation Studies
University of Bristol, Bristol, U.K.

Abstract

Non-native English-speaking students at, or about to enter British Universities and other Western universities where the language of instruction is English may experience challenges with academic writing, often one of the most important means of assessing students. Pre-sessional and in-sessional English academic writing courses have been developed to aid students, and traditionally covered a range of topics. This paper discusses essential 'pre-writing' tasks. It then outlines some of the essential elements of academic writing; these often focus on paragraph structure, basic components of an essay, and different functional types of essays. Other features covered by this paper include aspects of language such as level of formality, cohesive devices, caution and hedging, supplying evidence, and avoiding plagiarism, amongst others. This paper also emphasizes the growing importance of collaborative learning, critical thinking and autonomous learning which may be insufficiently familiar to students from non-Western learning environments where traditionally factual recall is given the greatest importance. Inductive and deductive approaches to paragraph organization, and also essay development have also been introduced. These approaches may also contrast with the rhetorical features familiar to non-native students from various cultures around the world and require special attention. Contemporary pre-sessional courses are also becoming more specialized, targeting English suitable for specific sets of disciplines at the undergraduate at postgraduate level. For example, courses focusing in STEM subjects (science technology, engineering and mathematics) are replacing more 'generic' academic English courses.

Keywords: academic English writing, inductive and deductive approaches, in-sessional English courses, pre-sessional English courses, rhetorical features of writing

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Introduction to academic writing and style

Non-native English-speaking students at, or about to enter British Universities and other Western universities where the language of instruction is English may experience linguistic challenges. They may also encounter a series of broader academic expectations that may differ to some, or a greater extent than the models experienced in the home country. Pre-sessional and in-session course courses are aimed to help non-native students understand and improve language and academic skills needed for success in a tertiary level education scenario.

Some students may have fairly limited writing experience even in their own mother tongue, particularly for longer written assignments. In certain academic cultures, essays have the primary aim of presenting information, rather than critically-assessing it, an essential feature in Western university situations. At times the strategies for writing may also differ from those of Western tertiary level academia, where a 'typical' university-level academic essay is only written after analyzing various sources, collecting, and collating relevant information after due analysis, and creating a new text with references.

In addition, the mother tongue (L1) rhetorical strategy for writing may vary substantially: for example Arabic is mostly inductive with multiple strands of thought being developed simultaneously, and English being generally deductive and developing a single argument or tightly-knit group of ideas (e.g. see Mallia, 2014; Mallia, 2015). Academic writing in English may therefore be a fairly new and challenging undertaking for some students for a variety of reasons.

Students may also only have a fairly broad idea of the academic expectations are in Western tertiary education institutions, and that a variety of different types of written work may be expected from them. These include taking notes, essays, reports, case studies, dissertations, theses, and power point slides, amongst others.

A further challenge for students involves understanding that any piece of writing may have one or more organizational pattern. A pattern of writing may consist, for example, of a process description or sequence, a chronological sequence with developments over time, comparison and contrast, argument and discussion, cause and effect, or situation-problem-solution scenarios.

Perhaps one of the greater challenges for students is academic writing style. Specifically, finding the balance between developing their own 'voice and ideas' when writing, yet following the conventions that generally hold for academic writing and acknowledging the role of others' ideas may also be a challenge.

'Before writing' tasks

Understanding the title and essay-type

University students need to understand what is actually being asked in an essay title to avoid misdirecting the task answer. Understanding the components of the title is perhaps the best strategy to focusing on what is actually being asked, and involve: (i) understanding the topic or subject matter, (ii) the topic focus or aspect required for answering the question, and (iii) specifically identifying instruction word(s) in the question and (iv) decide on the necessary

rhetorical strategy (essay-type) for answering the question, including: ‘**sequence**’, ‘**description**’, ‘**cause and effect**’, ‘**comparison and contrast**’, ‘argument and discussion’ or ‘problem-solution’.

Developing a thesis statement

After understanding the title and essay-type necessary, writing a thesis statement does not follow immediately. Before developing an argument to write on about a topic, evidence, has to be collected and organized, with the development of possible relationships and conflicts between known theories and arguments; this is often achieved through a process of ‘brainstorming’. These ideas can subsequently be distilled down to one major idea, or thesis statement that addresses the essay title, and that can also be supported with evidence.

Pragmatically, before writing commences it is therefore generally useful to write a brief outline of all the points that need to be considered in the answer and then restate the essay question and answer it with a thesis statement. After this planning stage, the question can be answered following the general rules of academic writing for a determined rhetorical strategy or essay-type that best addresses the task question.

Rhetorical strategy: essay types

The rhetorical strategy or essay-type for addressing task questions generally falls under: ‘**sequence**’, ‘**description**’, ‘**cause and effect**’, ‘**comparison and contrast**’, ‘argument and discussion’ or ‘problem-solution’. Some of the more complex types are here discussed.

‘Argument and discussion’ essays: critical thinking:

Simple recall of factual information is rarely only what is required to be successful at the tertiary level in Western educational institutions. Students are expected to engage with topics, examine various facets and viewpoints and progressively develop a stance. Therefore the capacity to do research, find relevant sources and critically assess them is an imperative feature of successful academic performance.

Often substantially different and even conflicting facets of any topic are present; critical and constructive thinking skills on the part of the writer are essential. In addition, note-taking and idea-organizational skills are necessary prior to commencing the writing task itself. When writing, students must be able to demonstrate familiarity with various aspects of an argument and present their own interpretations using a suitable academic style.

When taking two (or more) positions, information can be organized ‘in series’, having a ‘vertical’ organization of ideas. For example a paragraph (or series of paragraphs) showing ideas in favour of the topic are presented first, subsequently followed by one or more paragraphs with ideas against. This allows for the full development of a view-point before tackling an opposing one.

Conversely, information can be organized ‘in parallel’, having a ‘horizontal’ organization of ideas. For example a paragraph (or series of paragraphs) can show paired ideas both in favour and against of the topic are presented simultaneously. This allows for a more immediate and targeted argument development, focusing on different viewpoints of the same issue under discussion, before moving on to another related issue, which again is also analyzed from

different viewpoints. Paragraph organization related to how close different issues are, rather than if they present viewpoints that are in favour or against a particular topic.

Irrespective of the organizational pattern chosen, the language of discussion in academia has several traits, and would include phrases that: (i) introduce sources which support the writer's line of argument, (ii) introduce counter-arguments, (iii) present minority viewpoints, and (iv) show objectivity, thus avoiding presenting ideas as the writer's personal opinions.

While critical thinking is clearly relevant for 'argument and discussion' types of essays, they feature in many (if not all) essay-types. For example it is also a key feature of 'cause and effect', and 'problem-solution' essays.

'Problem-solution' essays

A very frequent way of presenting information when addressing an academic writing task is to organize it around a 'situation – problem-solution(s) – evaluation' framework. This pattern can be used to organize individual paragraphs, a series of paragraphs or even a complete essay, report or book.

The 'situation' helps the reader establish a context in which the rest of the writing can be embedded. Essential terms and jargon are also explained, preferably in context, in this section. Details of the limits of the scope of enquiry are also given here...the number and types of people, things, places, when and where and other features that establish and define the context of the problem at stake.

Once the background situation has been established, the problem can be clearly defined and the reasons why it is an issue. Generally, its causes are also explored, giving deeper meaning and significance to the problem. The in-depth exploration also helps the development of the section related to solutions, which are therefore embedded in a meaningful context. It is also generally expected that an evaluation of the solution(s) is effected as part of the conclusion. Therefore a critical, objective assessment of what has been achieved and may still need to be achieved is outlined.

'Cause and effect' essays

Academic writing often necessitates the discussion of the causes and effects of a scenario or situation, and requires the writer to use critical and constructive thinking skills. These are used to analyze and 'unpack' subject complexity into simpler, component blocks of information and explore how they interact (critical thinking). This strategy can be applied to help understand one or more causes, and the one or more effects they may give rise to, in addition to developing an understanding the relationships among causes and effects (constructive thinking).

The writing organizational strategy can also be 'in parallel', having a 'horizontal' organization of ideas, or 'in series', having a 'vertical' organization of ideas. In addition to organizational strategies, determined patterns of language are used in cause-effect writing to make the links more explicit. In particular, language may help the writer place more focus either on the cause, or on the effect.

Writing organization: text structure

Different writing genres (types) have diverse purposes and audiences, and so they require appropriate text structures. Yet irrespective of the essay rhetorical strategy, or essay type, the general **text structure** is similar and invariably follows a similar pattern: an introduction, followed by a body of writing, and ending with a conclusion.

The introduction

Where to begin is a crucial decision for a writer, and often this first impression sets the general tone (and evaluation) for the rest of the writing. Just as a good beginning can add value and draw a reader into a piece of writing, a mediocre beginning can give lasting bad impression or even discourage a reader from reading further.

Key features of an introduction include: (i) background information to set a meaningful context, (ii) justification for the choice and focus of topic, (iii) an outline of the essay, (iv) definition of key lexis (terms) essential for the topic, (v) thesis statement (a concise summary of the main point or claim), and (vi) purpose for writing the essay.

The thesis statement, often placed towards the end of the introduction, is a critical part of any introduction as it gives a clear guiding focus to the reader and sets expectations. There should be one key idea so that a clear idea and organization of the essay content, in addition to the writer's stance are succinctly presented.

The body

The organization of the body, and particularly the paragraphs within it, depend on the objectives of the paragraph and text as a whole, and belong to five basic organizational structures. A single essay often has paragraphs with several different types of structures.

The '**sequence**' structure uses time, numerical, or spatial order as the organizing structure. The '**description**' structure is used to describe the characteristic features and events of a specific subject. Descriptive reports may be arranged according to categories of related attributes, moving from general categories of features to specific attributes. The '**cause and effect**' structure is used to show causal relationships between events. Signal words for cause and effect structures also include *if...then*, *as a result*, and *therefore*. The '**comparison and contrast**' structure is used to explain how two or more objects, events, or positions in an argument are similar or different. Words used to signal comparison and contrast organizational structures include *same*, *different*, *alike*, *in contrast*, *similarities*, *differences*, and *on the other hand*. The '**problem and solution**' structure requires writers to state a problem and come up with a solution.

The conclusion

A strong conclusion can be circular, looping back to the beginning and summarize the highlights, restating the main points, being the final part of the text. It may also emphasize a final statement that drives home the main point of the writing, namely that specified in the thesis statement in the introduction. It is also an opportunity to explore the extent to which the writing has addressed the core issues covered by the thesis statement.

Therefore the features of a conclusion include: (i) comments on ideas in the essay, (ii) a logical conclusion from the development of the ideas in the writing, (iii) areas of need research and predictions for future developments in the topic field, (iv) limitations of the writing, and (v) reference to the thesis statement.

Core aspects of academic writing

Generic features

Academic writing has a more formal aspect and standard English is general used throughout, avoiding idiomatic or colloquial vocabulary. The accurate use of vocabulary is essential, giving consideration to both the denotation and connotation of the word. Precision in quantification for both facts and figures also reflects well in academia. Adverbs that show subjective involvement and personal attitude are generally avoided unless specifically requested by the task. Question forms, rhetorical or otherwise, are also generally not used. Numbering of sections is to be avoided, and continuous text is expected except in reports and possibly long essays. Strategies to develop cohesion among different sections need to be employed. When including lists these too need to be written as continuous prose, generally inserting 'and' before the last item. Inferences and conclusions should use cautious, tentative language, rather than written as absolute facts.

Verbs

Contracted verb forms are informal, and generally have no place in academic writing. Similarly, two-word verbs give an informal feel and often one-word equivalents should be used. A higher proportion of passive verbs are also used in academic writing, although these are to be used judiciously.

In academic writing, the present simple retains its essential functions for reporting facts and opinions that have been accepted, published, and are currently still considered to be valid. The present perfect can be used in these situations to underscore the past-to-present time-line link. The past simple can be used when reporting from a particular study which reflects more of an opinion, viewpoint or incompletely substantiated information, rather than 'factual' knowledge.

When including one's own opinion in writing, both the present simple or even present perfect can be used, together with the use of cautious language. Yet if new results or observations are the purpose of the study, and being described for the first time in the writing at hand, then the past simple should be used. The past simple should also be used for the materials, methods and procedures employed.

Definitions

Definitions are generally an integral part of academic writing, but which terms to define depend largely on the target audience, in addition to the terms themselves. Good definitions must be written concisely in simple, direct language; they clearly cannot be more complex than the original word, considering both the vocabulary used and also language structure. Sometimes more than one definition for a term is available, so phrases such as 'can be defined' and 'may be defined' are to be used to make this clear.

In some cases a single sentence is not sufficient to adequately define a term or concept, and a series of sentences may be needed. Generally, the first sentence is fairly generic, and subsequent sentences add layers of detail as may be required.

Irrespective of the complexity when defining terms, academic writers define terms to clarify the writing for readers. Conversely, university students define terms to make it clear that they themselves understand core concepts and terms.

Supporting argument

In academic writing one of the over-arching objectives is to develop arguments starting from basic principles, develop these providing support, and making broader generalizations that can be extrapolated to several situations. This is an inductive approach, whereby the writer starts from broader ideas and examples and progressively focuses on the specifics and develops conclusions that are evidence-based. Providing support or evidence is an essential part of academic writing and makes the writer's ideas more credible.

However, other approaches may be necessary for academic writing. For example a premise or statement is set, or even a loosely-held fact, opinion, or challenge. The writer starts from this specific point(s) of view and develops a series of arguments and discussion in favour, against or both, often together with a series of relevant cases, examples and non-examples to illustrate these. This is known as a deductive approach is also commonly needed when writing essays for postgraduate studies.

Whether an inductive or deductive approach is used, providing support for ideas therefore remains an essential part of academic writing. In addition to examples and cases from one's own knowledge where appropriate, quality objective writing also includes ideas from other people's work, and also using research findings when possible. Ideally these should include both qualitative and quantitative information, as this 'mixed method approach' tends to develop more completely and supply different types of support.

Paragraphs

Writing a paragraph in different discourse communities may vary, for example in the number of ideas within and the structural layout. An essential guideline for paragraph writing is the 'one paragraph, one idea concept'. Different ideas are therefore presented and developed in different paragraphs. The usual paragraph structure for English academic writing in Western institutions involves a topic sentence followed by one or more supporting sentences. A paragraph may also have a concluding sentence. This is a deductive pattern of information layout organization and is by far the most frequent. Inductive approaches to paragraph organization are less frequent.

It is important to realize that 'inductive' or 'deductive', when referring to paragraphs, does not necessarily reflect the overall nature of a 'deductive' or 'inductive' approach to writing an essay. Thus a mainly 'inductive' essay can be composed of many or even mostly 'deductive' paragraphs. The opposite may also be true, though less likely as many academic paragraphs do tend to be of a 'deductive' nature.

The topic sentence contains the topic and controlling ideas. It should not be too generic or specific and must be a complete sentence. Supporting sentences describe, illustrate, explain and generally develop the topic. A concluding sentence, when present, helps form inferences from the paragraph. It may also have the role of giving the reader an idea of the topic of the next paragraph, serving as a 'lead-in', and creating cohesion.

There are four basic paragraph types: narrative, descriptive, expository, and persuasive. Therefore the paragraph can be used to describe or explain an endless variety of things, and each paragraph type aims to achieve a specific objective: narrative paragraphs tell about a scene or event, descriptive paragraphs give detailed descriptions of one subject, expository paragraphs provide information, and persuasive paragraphs try to convince the reader. These four paragraph types are powerful tools for writers.

Cohesive devices

Cohesion refers to the creation of a unified and flowing text through the use of transition words including conjunctions, and reference words. There are six categories of transition words that help achieve text cohesion: (i) **spatial order words**, used in descriptive writing to signal spatial relationships, such as *above, below, beside, nearby, beyond, inside, and outside*, (ii) **time order words** used in writing narratives, and instructions to signal chronological sequence, such as *before, after, first, next, then, when, finally, while, as, during, earlier, later, and meanwhile*, (iii) **numerical order words** used in expository writing to signal order of importance, such as *first, second, also, finally, in addition, equally important, and more or less importantly.*, (iv) **cause/effect order words** used in expository writing to signal causal relationships, such as *because, since, for, so, as a result, consequently, thus, and hence*, (v) **comparison/contrast order words**, used in expository writing to signal similarities and differences, such as (for similarities) *also, additionally, just as, as if, as though, like, and similarly*; and (for differences) *but, yet, only, although, whereas, in contrast, conversely, however, on the other hand, rather, instead, in spite of, and nevertheless, and* (vi) **general/specific order words**, used in descriptive reports and arguments to signal more specific elaboration on an idea, such as *for example, such as, like, namely, for instance, that is, in fact, in other words, and indeed*.

Conjunctions can link a sentence to the following one (in addition to linking different parts of the same sentence) and may have the following functions: addition, result, reason, opposition, example and time. Examples of reference words include pronouns, possessive pronouns, objective pronouns, demonstrative pronouns and also other phrases. Repetition of key words and phrases, use of synonyms or paraphrase also help create a cohesive text.

Providing factual, ideological and objective support for academic writing

The paragraph layout in academic English paragraph generally follows a deductive pattern of information organization: a generalization or 'fact' followed by examples, details and evidence. Yet the general organization of the essay as a whole is inductive: from particular or individual instances to broader generalizations. While the derivation of generalizations depends on the writer, the overall credibility of the writing hinges on the use of specific examples, details and evidence that create a solid underpinning. Therefore a wide variety of detailed ideas,

perspectives, view-points and opinions are presented by the writer, who logically and systematically develops these into factual 'conclusions' that have wider application and meaning.

In addition to the writer's own knowledge and experience, evidence and examples generally stem from other people's work and research findings, both quantitative and qualitative. Other people's words and supporting arguments are also often presented. Writers' need to distinguish between their own ideas and those of others is essential, as is how these ideas are used; this is often referred to as 'academic honesty'.

Academic honesty: generalisations, moderation, caution and hedging

While good writers are critical thinkers and carefully assess what they read, in the same manner one's own writing will be critically evaluated by others. It is therefore essential that academic writing, where the rigour of quality checks is substantial, only includes information that is evidence-based, i.e. which we can account for to a reasonable degree. This is known as academic honesty, and helps guarantee the writer's credibility and also not mislead the reader.

Yet writers may be in a situation where they must include information which they are somewhat unsure about; this is in fact quite common in academic writing, including highly-rigorous scientific writing. The greater the degree of uncertainty about information quality, the greater the caution with which it should be presented. This is the rationale behind strong, emphatic language not generally being associated with academic writing, where a more cautious, conservative style is favoured. Often called 'hedging', this strategy is particularly so when writing the discussion and conclusion sections, where students have the opportunity to express their own inference and viewpoints.

Ways in which to give a more cautious tone to academic writing include (i) the use of modals, (ii) terms that imply varying degrees of probability, (iii) adding distance between the and a statement or claim that could be overstated or even incorrect, (iv) using generalisations and (v) using weaker verbs.

Using and acknowledging the work of other writers

Academic writing essentially contains information such as the ideas, theories, data, opinions of others and these citations must be acknowledged to avoid presenting these as one's own. This would otherwise constitute plagiarism, intentional or accidental omission of specifying the source of information, which is unacceptable in academic circles. Yet not all the supporting evidence and information in the writing has to be referenced: common facts, well-established ideas and notions and 'common knowledge' in general are generally not referenced.

Summarizing and paraphrasing

The decision what is important to be summarized depends on the thesis statement of the essay, or writing objective in general. Therefore summarizing a text starts with the identification of key vocabulary and ideas in relation to this. Notes of these should be taken, using one's own words without altering the meaning. Expand the notes and write the summary, reorganizing the sequence of the ideas as necessary. A reference should be included to indicate where the information came from. Read and edit the summary as may be needed to ensure that the important points have all been included, fit together logically, and not been altered.

Paraphrasing essentially involves rewriting others' work in one's own words without altering the core meaning. The style and genre can also be changed to suite the purpose and writing objectives if different from the original text. Once the purpose of paraphrasing has been established, gathering an understanding of the meaning and importance of the sentence(s) involved is necessary. Identification of (i) specialized or technical terms is needed as they cannot be changed, and also (ii) keywords and expressions that can be substituted with synonyms or alternative forms. In addition, entire sentences are also often reformulated, and a reference should still be included to indicate where the information came from.

Combining sources

The production of most writing at a tertiary level requires the reading of several sources and the synthesis of different ideas, some which may even be conflicting. Organizing and presenting ideas from a variety of sources is a prerequisite that is often a challenge to students.

Mentioning sources is particularly relevant in the introductory phases of writing as it creates an underpinning solid theoretical or ideological foundation. In addition, it shows that the writer is familiar with contemporary literature related to the topic, but should also show the writer's capacity to evaluate and conglomerate various writings and ideas into a coherent, logical composition. The appropriate referencing of all the sources used helps avoid the possibility of 'patchwork' plagiarism.

Many students erroneously feel that if they attribute all ideas and sources used to other authors (as is in fact appropriate), then their contribution is nil. The essential message is that students are evaluated on their capacity of understanding and judiciously incorporating others' work, at this stage, rather than propose personal ideas; this is their required contribution. Students' contribution and 'voice' comes in the form of critical thinking and constructive thinking skills...how well can information be challenged and verified, how well can different ideas be collated to create a new 'whole', take fresh perspectives, give different (albeit incompletely substantiated) interpretations and present these as their own referenced writing.

In-text references

In-text references are used in the writing text itself to show the source of ideas, diagrams, statistics and other information from other sources that is being used. They may include the family name(s) of the author(s) in the text with publication year in brackets, or both author(s) and year can be in brackets; the latter format places less importance on who supplied the information and more emphasis placed on the nature of the information itself. This sounds more objective and is often preferred, unless there is specific need to highlight authors. Secondary sources refer to those not read by the writer, but accessed through other's writing; these must also be referenced appropriately.

Quotations

Quotations from others' writing are also used to support the writer's arguments, or for the writer to argue against them and promote an alternative. While referenced paraphrase or summary are generally used, quotations are used if (i) provides an accurate definition, (ii) concepts, evidence or examples are expressed particularly well, (iii) to add the weight of

authority associated with the writer of the quote. Otherwise, quotations should generally be sparingly used.

Reference list and bibliography

A reference list at the end of the written text lists all the in-text-citations used for the readers' easy reference. A bibliography is similar but more extensive, and also includes works consulted but not referred to directly in the text, or that may be relevant as additional information and consulting for the reader.

Additional aspects for academic writing

In addition to the 'classic' element described above that have been given long-standing importance in academic English writing courses, other aspects considered highly important are emerging. These include collaborative learning, critical thinking and autonomous learning.

Collaborative learning and critical thinking

Collaborative learning involves presenting a variety of tasks to the learner, some of which can be accomplished and others not. Other tasks lie in between these two areas, within what is called the 'zone of proximal development', as based on Vygotsky's concept of learning (1997). These tasks represent a category of things that a learner can accomplish only with the help of support or peer view-exchange, and guide which set of skills the learner is developing.

Moreover, learning through communication and interactions with others enhances the possibility of success with this category of tasks, and collaborative learning (as opposed to only independent work) tends to increase the level of success. Individuals are able to achieve higher levels of learning and retain more information when they work in a group rather than individually (Gokhale, 1995). Indeed critical thinking skills are sharpened via this type of learning interaction.

The identification and evaluation of evidence to help guide decision making is central to critical thinking, allowing for the use of holistic in-depth analysis of evidence to take decisions and present ideas objectively. Hence critical thinking is considered important in the academic fields because it enables objectivity, precisely the ability to analyze, evaluate, present and reformulate ideas rather than base them on opinion. Critical thinking must therefore essentially include identification of prejudice, bias, propaganda, self-deception, distortion, misinformation and any approach that is not based on evidence. Perhaps not surprisingly, the teaching of critical thinking skills is considered to be an increasingly important component of academic pre-sessional programmes, in addition to the regular features of such courses outlined in the previous sections.

Autonomous learning

The concept of 'learner autonomy' was first coined Holec (1981) and defined by him as the ability to take charge of one's own learning. Independence, autonomy and the ability to control learning experiences has come to play an increasingly important role in language education (Hurd, 1981).

When considering learner autonomy, it can be viewed short-term as a means to an end, namely learning English, or as an end in itself in making students in pre-sessional courses

autonomous learners. These two options do not exclude each other, both of them can be part of teachers' and learners' views towards language learning, or learning in general (Dam, 1995).

Discussion and conclusions

Non-native English-speaking students at during pre-sessional courses may experience diverse linguistic writing challenges, several of which have been concisely described above. Thus the focus on language *per se* in the pre-sessional writing courses is generally at the paragraph level. A point to consider is that many students coming from radically different language-groups such as those from China and the Middle East also may still have substantial challenges at the sentence level, yet syntax is not addressed during the course and (perhaps justifiably due to IELTS scores) students are assumed to be of an adequate level, when it perhaps is not always so.

In addition to the intrinsic language focus, pre-sessional courses emphasize the concerns with plagiarism. How this is perceived, and the consequences may be drastically different than those within home-country universities. In addition to the serious consequences, explaining to learners how highly prestigious quoting or paraphrasing other authors' acknowledged work is seen to be and well-rewarded for those doing this in their academic essays. Finally, strategies and practice opportunities for paraphrasing, synthesis and summary help empower students and avoid plagiarism.

The increasing awareness to the importance of collaborative learning is another important focus learning how to take part in group work confidently and effectively are at the forefront of the objectives of an academic English pre-sessional. Similarly, developing critical thinking skills – scrutinizing, unpacking and reorganizing information routinely prior to attempting academic writing are now considered to be core academic skills. While the need for collaboration during learning is emphasized, an overall strategy for autonomy – autonomous learning, and indeed life-long learning are other essential features of contemporary programmes.

Pre-sessional programs therefore have now extended their role to well beyond the language focus. They give students a more holistic package of academic skills that allow them to approach postgraduate studies, and the world of work beyond with greater confidence and probability of success. Moreover, contemporary pre-sessional courses are also becoming more specialized, targeting English suitable for specific sets of disciplines at the undergraduate at postgraduate level. For example, courses focusing in STEM subjects (science technology, engineering and mathematics), and other having a humanities 'slant' are replacing more 'generic' academic English courses. This will help exploit the highly limited time at the disposition of students prior and during graduate postgraduate studies being conducted in English as the language of instruction.

Note: *This paper reflects ideas and issues presented by the author at the Arab Society for English language Studies (ASELS) Annual Conference Proceedings, held on 26-17th May 2016 at Mohammed V University of Rabat, Morocco.

About the Author:

Dr. Joseph Mallia:

The author's focus is on researching, developing, and delivering English for academic purposes courses particularly for non-Western university students. He is also a specialist in the organization, evaluation and implementation of language-related projects in the European Union and internationally. The author also actively develops specialized courses and pedagogy to help displaced immigrants integrate in recipient countries

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