

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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