

### **Chapter III**

#### **Essentials of Academic Writing**

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**Abstract:** This chapter provides an in-depth exploration of the essentials of academic writing, emphasizing its structured, logical, and evidence-based nature. Academic writing is presented as a serious and formal endeavor, requiring thorough preparation, research, and adherence to conventions such as correct punctuation, citation, and logical sequencing of ideas. The author explains the importance of prewriting, writing, and rewriting, along with the necessity of incorporating evidence and proper citation to lend credibility to any academic work. Additionally, the chapter stresses the need for clear, well-structured paragraphs, proper use of transitional links, and symmetrical formatting. By mastering these components, academic writing becomes a coherent, professional form of communication.

**Keywords:** Academic Writing, Research, Structured Writing, Citation, Punctuation



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If I am careful about how I am dressing and presenting myself before the world. It clearly has a very different impact. Taking care of small things, taking care of all the little nuances that go into the making of what looks appropriate adds a lot of meaning to whatever we do. It's a similar thing and it's a similar kind of a distinction that I'm trying to make between taking your writing casually or taking your writing with utmost academic seriousness and this presentation that I'm making today will be an attempt to put forth that when we're out to do professional academic writing or when we are out to do formal academic writing. It is a serious business. It needs preparation. It needs some kind of study. It needs years of research and practice. It is not done overnight, but it is an effort in which all of you should start investing from the present day itself, so the presentation will basically be an endeavour to sort of shape up those ideas in your mind and I believe that towards the end of my presentation, if I would have succeeded in conveying to you the absolute importance of this, then the whole purpose of this endeavour would have been successful.

Now what I'll do is even if it's not visible on a wider screen, let me speak it out so that you understand it clearly. I'm sure it's clearly visible though. You can see it right in front of you. Now if you actually look at the errors, see I have corrected all the errors in this. Can you see this font written in red ink? Can everybody see this font written in red ink towards the bottom of the slide? These are the corrections. Look at the corrections, the capital of the word Renaissance because Renaissance is a specific noun, the capital of the word Renaissance. The letter r becomes capital. Before sixteenth century we need to put a 'the', an article is required. For Europe, which is again a specific noun, a proper noun that E has to go capital. If you actually read the sentence, when we are talking about academic writing. We are looking at sentences structurally and semantically. We are looking at them in both these domains. Now, if you look at the sentence. It has been associated with reformers; it looks slightly improper. So, what I've done is I have made it better by converting reformers into a phrase, plethora of reformers. And then what do I do after that? Humanist and free-thinking people, we don't need a comma here because these are just two categories when we have two similar kinds of categories, we need a conjunction. We don't need a comma. We need a comma when we have

more than two kinds of similar categories, that's a basic rule. Kind of role and understanding of punctuation that we do have. They were basically humanist and free-thinking people and of course, all these names of the humanists that you see, we need to capitalize the first letter, so all the first letters need to be capitalized, which I have done. If you see corrections below this then the human and the divine again, the same thing, we need to replace comma with a conjunction, spelling error has to be corrected. There needs to be a comma that has to come before, 'became', because you know when you're dealing with a longer sentence which has more than two clauses, then you need to be very, very particular about how you have to use your commas. If you are not sure about your usage of commas, kindly avoid long sentences.

As you move professionally, as you move higher professionally, you will discover it is very difficult to avoid long sentences. The best thing to do is, be observant, be adept and be extremely careful with your punctuation and that comes with a lot of practice. If you actually look at this sentence, this long sentence which is made of three clauses. I have put my commas at the right place- *ek comma yahan humanism se pehle hai, aur ek comma became se pehle hai*. Became the foundation for many new ideas. Do you see the corrections? Everybody now I want you to tell me what difference has the correction made? I have just followed my correct academic conventions. The difference between the two pieces is the first piece doesn't have the academic conventions applied correctly. The next one has. Can anyone tell me what difference does it make? I want somebody to answer, please, just so that all of this doesn't become too dull. Yes, Mona, will you want to say something?

Mona: "Ma'am Can you repeat it?"

Guntasha: What difference do you see between the two pieces? After applying the correct academic conventions, what difference do you see?

Mona: The second one is much clearer in presenting the information.

Guntasha: Very good, excellent, excellent. And don't you think what we are trying to communicate becomes more effective? When we are extremely discreet and careful about what we are doing with our words. How we are framing our sentences. And there has to be a sense of consciousness and deliberate understanding about what we are writing, how we are writing and why we are writing the way we are writing. Somewhere that understanding forms the very starting point to master what we call academic writing.

Okay, let us go to the definition of academic writing, is the slide visible to everybody? The fourth Slide? Based on what we have seen, we can clearly define academic writing. Based on what we have seen we can clearly come to a definition of academic writing and I would not merely want to just read this definition. I would want to focus on each of the emphasized portions with some kind of detail and deliberation. Let me first read the whole definition and I want you to listen to it with utmost care and to actually internalize this concept. Academic writing refers to that structured writing which is logical, factual, evidence based and cohesive. It is research and citation based and follows a thorough process of prewriting, writing and rewriting.

Before I actually go into the details of all of this. I would want, maybe Asif to help me out and speak something out here. Asif you are working with the water conservation project, that's what I was told by sir also towards the beginning. Asif you can just to unmute yourself, maybe?  
Asif: "Okay"

Guntasha: Asif, what kind of writing do you do in your association with this particular domain.

Asif: Technical writing

Guntasha: Technical writing you do. So, is it similar to what we are discussing right now? You write in paragraphs and it's a kind of a draft that you prepare or is it different? Kind of same, but I do write in points. You write in points. Okay, let's just come back to this definition. I'll go back to my screen and in fact, let me just talk about this one by one. First things first. I am working somewhere where I'm given a project and for example, let's take a simple example. I'll take an example and then I'll explain with this definition because that way I think it will become a way much more sort of familiar to you. For example, I have to write a report on a certain project that I have completed or something, which is a professional assignment. How do I go about doing it? There is a whole range of information that's lying in front of me, a sea of information. I can just not immediately start. Is it possible that I just have this information and I'll just start writing that cannot happen. We are not talking about casual writing. We are not talking about creative writing. To some extent there is also a difference between academic and technical writing there and we're talking about serious academic writing, which is formal. What do you think is the first step that I am going to do? Amidst the sea of information that I have, I'll sit and I'll sift and I'll read this information first of all, and I'll filter out the facts that I need. Is it not so? And when I will filter out my facts, I will also make it a point that I noted my sources. For example, I have a lot of information, something I take from somewhere,

something I take from somewhere. I have to mention all of them in my report. I cannot even mention them casually. If I have to write them, I will have to associate them with the sources. I will have to ultimately mention all the sources that are involved in collecting this information, in getting this information together. That's also one thing.

Now, after having read and collated my information, I'll have to write it down somewhere. The next thing that I have to do is, this is where this whole thing about prewriting, writing and rewriting assumes relevance. The next very important thing that I have to do is, which is actually my pre-writing stage. I should be numbering jo maine information ikhati ki haina sources ke sath usmein mujhe bhot jaruri hoga ki I number ki maine konsi cheez pehle kehni hai. Ek report mein obviously, kuch cheezein pehle aati hai, kuch uske baad mein aati hain. Some come at the towards absolute later end. For example, if this report is about a visit to say some kind of a conservation site or to some kind of heritage sort of a destination or anything. Then when did the team go and what was the purpose of the visit, what was the place which was visited, these are the initial details and they will have to move in the initial part of the report that I'm preparing. That kind of a structuration needs to be worked out right at the beginning. I cannot think ki chalo main likhna shuru kar deti hu main likhte likhte soch lungi mujhe kab konsi baat kahan kehni hai, aisa nahi hota hai. Aapko likhne se pehle hi, prewriting stage mein hi sochna hoga konsi cheez aap pehle kahenge. And then which is the next set of things that will go into the middle paragraphs and which will be the next set of things that go into the concluding paragraph. This is academic writing; you cannot just write anything that you like. You have to give observations. You have to give facts. You have to give evidence, depending on the kind of situation that you are writing on. For example, in this particular topic, the example that I have taken, all facts are going to be there. Which place was visited, when was this place visited, how many people visited, why was this visit done, what all was observed, what all was seen, what was so enthralling about the place, how did it contribute to the outcome of the organization? These are all fact-based things. The starting point or the very pulse of academic writing is fact and evidence. The facts and the evidence need to be given key cognizance and they can absolutely not be compromised upon at any cost.

The other thing you need to work out, the logical sequencing of the ideas and that is when you start writing. Moving ahead from this. Once I start writing, how do I start writing? I have to send you the reviews to the academic write-ups that would be given after the session, but I must say without getting into names, a general observation that you are not doing it as formally as it should be done and you are just, it seemed for many of you, it seemed that you are writing

and you're thinking alongside that what do I do now? you know, what do I do now? How do I go to the next paragraph? What do I write in the next paragraph? That should not be the case. Like I said, the content of the paragraphs needs to be determined pretty much at the pre-writing stage. You need to have paragraphs which are almost of equal length. Your paragraphs cannot be too asymmetrical. And this asymmetrical paragraphing was another problem that I observed in the write-ups that I saw. Asymmetrical paragraphing means one paragraph is six lines, the other paragraph is sixteen lines, then one paragraph is three lines. It cannot be like that. You have to decide before you start your writing. You have to decide on a range for yourself.

Which means how I write my paragraph or how I compose my paragraph is the key to success to a good academic write-up and trust me, it will come with practice. When you actually end a paragraph, you need to take care of its length. You need to take care of the fact that it suitably sums up one idea because that's we all know is the very basic definition of a paragraph. Is it not so? And then we also need to take care of the fact that when we move to the next paragraph our previous and the succeeding paragraphs are related to each other. Usually it is our language, it is the power of our language, it is the knowledge of our language that helps us provide those transitional links. For example, if I have and I will show you an example also. For example, if I've written a paragraph and have completed it. Now I want to start the next paragraph. Do you notice it automatically connects whatever now I'm going to say with what I said previously, the word, therefore, it is that kind of a conjunction. It is that kind of a linker that it gives me the option of using a very, very suitable transitional link and I'm just giving you an example. There are so many transitional links in English language, so wherever possible, those transitional links need to be used. I'm not necessarily saying, but wherever possible do that because using transitional links add a lot of structural coherence to our write-ups. If the paragraphs are free floating in our write up and they are looking asymmetrical which was the problem with many of your write-ups that was sent to me.

I'm just trying to give you the basic skeleton, sort of, understanding to academic writing via this definition. After you have written, after your write up is over, you will obviously need citations which are usually quite often supplied through a system of end notes. If I have sources, I have to mention my sources. They can be books, they can be articles, they can be websites whatsoever those sources are, the sources need to be mentioned. There is a system of doing that. One person has done that beautifully in her write-up. Without referencing, research and citation, without that, academic writing is not academic writing. It is just a mere piece of casual write-up. It's a cross between casual write-up and formal write-up. You don't always have

sources there. But in academic writing, we are talking about sources. We are talking about research-based evidence. We are talking about citations

And once I have written my write-up, it is very important for me to read it thoroughly, proofread it, edit it and you know what, it goes without saying how well can I edit what I have written depends on the knowledge of language that I have. If my knowledge of English language is powerful, I will be able to write also coherently and correctly and I will also be able to edit it thoroughly. Or if there's any other problem, which is linked to grammar then obviously it will reflect and for a lot of write-ups that I received, the grammatical problem was there. I will come to it again in one of the later slides. All good till here. Did you get a hang of the definition and the concept of academic writing?

In this particular slide I have the distinct elements of academic writing listed and they are more or less what we have discussed. Whenever we are doing an academic write-up, it is very important for us to give it title to give it a kind of a heading and that heading almost becomes a kind of a binding factor to my write-up. Now what is a thesis statement? It reflects again and again in my write-up because it's like a binding thread, whatever is the heading whatever is the topic sentence, whatever is the thesis statement is a kind of a binding thread. This example that I had taken for all of you, the visit to heritage property, in a case like this, what do you think can be my suitable title to the report? A suitable title to the report could be a visit to Lodhi Gardens, and this is my heading because in academic writing we need to keep our heading simple. We need to keep our heading to the point; we need to keep our heading factual. A heading should make this very clear and this very evident to the person reading what is trying to, what is the write-up trying to communicate at the end of the day.

Now, if you see the sense of this heading is going to reflect at different levels in my academic write-up and that's where I see it is this heading, it is this topic sentence or it is this thesis statement that becomes the binding factor to everything that I'm going to write. When we start writing, it's also very important to focus on how I write my first paragraph. Everybody knows like Asif was saying, that we write in points. Good academic writing is never written in points. It's written in paragraphs. Technical writing can be written in points, but bullets are usually used where they need to be used even in technical writing. But in academic writing we are sticking to paragraphs and we are not using subtitles. Please mind that there are people who use subtitles in academic writings. There are types of academic writings, for example, scientific research, dissertations and those kinds of pieces where subtitles are preferred. That's okay. But

when I'm talking about a short piece of academic writing. The kind of pieces that you people have given to me there we are not really talking about subtitles.

So, when I open up my academic write-up the first paragraph that I write it should look like the first paragraph in the manner because of the manner in which it is written. The introducing paragraph needs to be very, very strong. introducing paragraph needs to set the tone and the momentum and the tempo to the write up that follows. Is this clear to everyone till here. Once I have given the key details in my introducing paragraph and we also need to remember when we are dealing with academic writing, we cannot waste our sentences. We cannot write just for the sake of it. so even in our introducing paragraph we will have to mention two or three key points that we intend to sort of write in this write up. For example, in the particular case of this visit to the Lodhi Gardens, this particular example that we are discussing you can very clearly mention the date and the venue and the day on which this visit was made and the group which made this visit in the introducing paragraph itself. There's no need to take it to the next paragraph.

Now concluding paragraph is the one that's actually giving us the chance to bring all our observations together, to basically give a sense of submission to the reader. Everything that I have said so far, how am I going to conclude it, in say, four to five lines towards the fag end that's the critical role that a concluding paragraph makes. We have to be again, very careful in how we are writing it and if you're writing coherently, if we are writing on the correct lines, these are very natural things that happen all by themselves, concluding paragraph organically emerges in a beautiful and comprehensive way. If we have written, our academic writing with all the correct conventions. After my write-up gets over, I need to be careful about how I am documenting my sources, how I am mentioning my endnotes and how I am creating my work cited list. Those are very, very key critical academic conventions followed at the advanced professional levels and trust me there are books. There are style sheets. There are citation guidelines that can train you for that. There's absolutely no need to worry. And ideally in the last semester of the post-graduation, I think most of you either are in post-graduation or have done it or probably you are planning to. In the last semester of post-graduation, you should start thinking on these lines that how I am documenting, how I have to document my sources. you should start purchasing books on academic writing and I have, I will be having some sources out here as well which I'll be sharing with you. You should be investing in all of this to ensure that this becomes a habit by the time you reach research level.



Let us now look at the different situations and occasions of academic writing that I believe each of you has to engage in in probably your different capacities as interns or as say, professionals or as young professionals or as people who are aspiring to do post-graduation. When we do research, say an M. Phil., that is leading us to a PhD, we of course have to take our academic writing very seriously to the T because research is all about following the conventions of academic writing. So, for anybody out here who is genuinely interested in mastering the conventions of academic writing, a PhD. degree or a pre-PhD. degree is not a bad idea. You can think about it. Nowadays, you can do your research while doing your jobs also. It's something that you can seriously think about if you are genuinely very interested in academic writing because in academic writing, short term courses don't help. You should do a full-fledged degree in academic writing, which is usually a research degree to ensure that you get a hang of the conventions. So, the situations of academic writing we all know what they can be. They can be research, scientific investigations. At a smaller level, at your level, essays, book reviews, conference papers, journal papers may be there- these are all examples of our academic write-ups.



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