

Academic Writing: An Attempt to Demystify and Contextualize

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Abstract

This paper attempts to demystify and contextualize academic writing by clarifying its major elements and showing how a conscious writer can easily consider them and write effectively. In our academia, the term 'academic writing' is made complicated by stuffing with jargons and equating it unnecessarily with complex writing. In contrast to these ideas, this paper unfolds the crucial components of academic writing and demonstrates how a potential writer can easily reflect on them and make writing impressive and effective. Following qualitative research design, this research obtains data from different scholarly publications to justify the claim. The paper concludes with the idea that academic writing is not a form of writing that is guided by the motive of complexity but it follows certain steps and communicates with the readers in a clear, logical and precise way. Moreover, this paper aims to correct the misconception of people toward academic writing and show how it is a process based activity that demands conscious and careful attempts than ingenuity.

Keywords: clarify, complexity, concise, misconception, process

Introduction

Writing is often considered challenging task, as it requires high level of seriousness. This seriousness is necessary due to its recorded nature. Speech lasts to the time of listening until it is recorded in a certain device but writing's uniqueness is its aftermath position or situation. More reading is needed for better writing. Logic based and data based writing, which is favored by modern readers, needs more effort and seriousness. In the absence of deeper and serious reading, writing has become a complex task at present. Moreover, academic writing needs standard structure, formal tone and word selection, clarity and a certain process to follow. That is why it is taken as a more complex task. There is no doubt that academic writing should be “authentic, logical

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and research based” (Sharma, 2017, p. 41). It differs in many aspects from general writing. However, it is not a complex task to terrorize the writers. This paper claims that while academic writing requires seriousness and adherence to processes, it is not as complex as it is often portrayed in academic circles.

Academic writing is formal writing, which is characterized by clear, concise, structured and at the same time evidence based argument. The use of words like clear, concise, structured etc. creates the impression that academic writing is complex one. However, the reality is different. If we follow certain guidelines and structure, it is easier than other forms of writing. This writing aims to demystify and contextualize academic writing showing the simple ways that it passes through. It needs to avoid complex words and structures, lengthy explanations and unnecessary background. It should be in appropriate structure, simple and concise. Claims should be supported with evidence, like statistics, anecdotes, facts, examples and reasons. In short, academic writing is not mysterious task and does not need extraordinary skill for it. But it just needs seriousness to consider its multiple aspects.

Literature Review

Different writers have written about writing and expressed their views about the ways of making them effective in communication. Writing has become a very crucial thing today because of the changed mode of communication. Bauman (2007) points to the increased value of writing in the modern context. He asserts, “The computer age has made writing more important than ever. Fax, email, and the Internet are replacing the telephone and the personal visiting” (p. 3). People think that the value of writing has decreased at present but in reality, it is increasing. The modern means of communication are more writing oriented. Without good information, writing is not possible. To acquire more information, we need serious reading and better comprehension. In this respect, Singh (2020) claims, "Writing ability is generated only from conscious learning or good comprehension" (p. 136). Singh points that the most important prerequisite for better writing is conscious learning and better comprehension of the issue.

Similarly, discussing the value of writing to test the learning level of the learner Harmer (2007) argues, "Testing the writing proficiency of the students means measuring their knowledge in depth" (p. 3). Harmer's point of focus is to clarify the significance of

writing in relation to the measurement of the depth of knowledge of the learners. It means an effective writing needs depth of knowledge and serious comprehension.

Moreover, scholars have pointed out different aspects of academic writing in their works. Discussing academic writing and the position a writer needs to maintain, Tardy (2010) points, "Academic writing often requires students to write from an expert position, even when they do not consider themselves to be experts on their topics" (p. 13). Tardy highlights the expert position that a writer needs to consider in case of academic writing. There is no doubt that academic writing needs clear and authentic data backed up by evidence. In Wikipedia academic writing is defined as:

Academic writing typically uses a more formal tone and follows specific conventions. Central to academic writing is its intertextuality, or an engagement with existing scholarly conversations through meticulous citation or referencing of other academic work, which underscores the writer's participation in the broader discourse community. (Academic Writing, 2024)

Here formal tone, specificity, scholarliness and proper referencing are focused. Formality in tone and vocabulary is the prominent feature of academic writing. In case of academic writing, scholarly publications should be the sources of the ideas and information. Moreover, they should be referenced properly. Failure to acknowledge the source is taken as a serious mistake in such writing.

Echoing similar ideas, Ferris (2018) has summarized the features of successful academic writers and standards of writing used in academic and professional contexts as:

Successful writing in academic and professional settings requires a complex range of skills and knowledge bases. Writers must have at least an adequate grasp of the content about what they are writing. They must understand the rhetorical situation, including the purpose of the writing and the knowledge and expectations of their audience of readers. ... writers need advanced control of the linguistic features (vocabulary, spelling, grammar, cohesive ties) and extra-linguistic features (punctuation, capitalization, formatting) appropriate for the content, genre, and target audience for their text. (p. 75)

Ferris has pointed to the complexity of the skills and knowledge that a good academic writer needs. Sufficient and scholarly understanding of the content with acute rhetorical analysis are important additional aspects of academic writing.

Johnson (2016) adds that academic writing has three main characteristics, "It is an art, a science, and a craft" (p. xi). In a short and sweet way Johnson clarifies the unique features of academic writing. It is an art, as it needs particular skills to complete. It is science as it demands evidence to justify the claim and it is craft as it equally focuses on the style of the composition.

This literature review shows that different writers have discussed writing from the perspective that it is a difficult task. Moreover, others have discussed academic writing and shown that it is more arduous. Bauman indicates the value of writing in the modern world whereas Singh discusses the linkage between reading and writing and Harmer points to the value of writing to measure a learner's depth of knowledge. Moreover, discussing academic writing Tardy highlights the need of writing from an expert's position and Wikipedia stresses the scholarliness. Ferris's position is to show the essentiality of skill and knowledge in academic writing. Johnson points to its multidimensionality. For him it is art, science and craft. Our critical observation of the literature on academic writing leads to one conclusion. In common, they have created the impression that academic writing is a complex task that needs unique quality to master. Very few have attempted to explain academic writing in a simple and comprehensive way to clarify that it is a process based activity. This is the research gap identified and taken as worthy to research. This research work aims to fulfil this gap interacting with different scholarly ideas presented in multiple publications.

Method and Material

This research work follows qualitative research design and typically applies library study. It depends on the scholarly publications: books, journals and articles related to the research issue for the data collection. The ideas collected from multiple sources are synchronized to justify the claim that academic writing is not a mysterious and complex task but a process based task that leads to better communication.

Result and Discussion

This is the major part of this research work. The discussion presented in this chapter justifies that academic writing needs to follow certain steps and keep in mind certain considerations that ultimately makes it an easier task. The following components should be considered to make academic writing attractive and impressive. Our familiarity with them makes it easier. A conscious reader can follow them and be a good writer. An effective writer should consider audience and purpose, present arguments as per need, follow certain strategies and consider proper organization and style. Only then, a writer can effectively communicate with the targeted readers. Let us discuss them in detail.

Audience and Purpose

Every writing aims to communicate with readers or the audiences to achieve certain purposes. Before we begin to write, we should keep in mind our audience as our main goal is to communicate with them. Swales and Feak (2016) clarify the value of the audience, “Your understanding of the audience will affect the content of your writing” (p. 4). If we are writing for a special type of audience with certain background knowledge, we need to be careful to present specific data rather than general information. But for the general audience basic ideas should be presented first. Our failure to keep our audience in mind makes us one sided and biased. To be neutral and objective we should address the counter arguments. It means a writer should imagine what type of question his readers might raise and expect to get an answer. This makes a writer always conscious about the critical perception of the readers and alert in the presentation of the ideas.

There are multiple subjects and writing styles. The selection of the subject, nature of the content and style, are purposive. The basic purpose of the writer is to convince and persuade readers. We present data, statistics to convince, and emotional arguments to persuade. Whatever type of information we present in our writing, they should be focused on one main purpose. Multiple purposes make our writing weak and single purpose helps for coherence and unity. According to Bailey (2015), there are three main reasons for writing: (1) to argue on a subject of common interest and give the writer’s view, (2) to report on a piece of research study and create some new knowledge, and (3) to synthesize research conducted by others on a topic.

So audience and purpose are The writer who is successful in writing keeping these two aspects in mind can achieve his/her goal.

Arguments

Argument does not mean quarrel or suppression of the opponent's voice. We can make our argument even respecting the voices and beliefs of others. The effectiveness of any argument depends on how much respect we have paid to the reader's side. "So an argument can be any text written, spoken, and aural or visual- that expresses a point of view" (Lunsford, et. al., 2019, p. 61). To influence readers and persuade them toward the claim writers use different types of arguments. Everything can be an argument but we need a strong argument to justify our claim. An argument becomes strong when supported by logic and reasoning. Three types of arguments are used mostly in academic writing.

Argument Based on Emotion: Pathos - Emotional appeals are the powerful tools for influencing people's thinking and belief. At present different social medias use arguments to persuade the audience emotionally. Sometimes facts fail to convince deeply that emotional appeal does. Writers should be able to show their understanding of the reader's problem for creating better influence. "Before they trust you, they'll want assurance that you understand the issue in depth" (Booth et al., 2008, p. 111). If someone is speaking about unemployed persons, reference of his or her unemployed period creates pathos and his arguments prove more effective. Our religious leaders use emotional arguments to persuade people to donate large amounts of money for social work. Objectiveness is the major quality of academic writing, but it is not like science and mathematics. In the neutrality of such writing there should be the touch of emotional elements for making it more convincing.

Argument Based on Character: Ethos – When readers read any text, they do not believe the idea presented there instantly. They like to learn about the person who has imparted the argument. They judge the credibility and authenticity of the writer. To make the idea believable, a strong connection between the reader and the argument should be established. Writer's belongingness and expertise help greatly to create this ethos. A person with a doctorate degree in a particular field is regarded as more credible than others. Professional success also creates the credibility of the person for

the public. Sanduk Ruit has stronger credibility in the field of eye care than any other doctors and Bhagwan Koirala has the same credibility in the field of heart care. When American president tells anything world listens carefully and believes. It is cause of the ethos of this post.

Argument Based on Facts and Reasons: Logos – The world is moving to the age of massive information. Even a single event is presented from multiple perspectives with so many contradictory ideas in social media. They are presenting misinformation, disinformation and outright lies as fact. That is why, even after the presentation of evidence, readers are unwilling to change their previous beliefs. Elizabeth Kolbert rightly indicates, “Even after the evidence for their beliefs had been totally refuted, people fail to make appropriate revisions to those beliefs” (qtd. in Lunsford et al., 2019, p. 148). In such a context searching for trustworthy facts and valid reasoning has become a more important task. To persuade the readers, writers should present authentic facts from credible sources and strong reasoning to support the claim made. It should be clarified that the logical appeal is factually correct and ethical. Presentation of facts, statistics, finding of survey and poll as well as proper testimonials and narratives make the claim strong in writing.

Strategies

For making the task of academic writing easier and effective, different scholars have suggested different strategies. All writers feel fear at first, even known ones. Those who utilize fear properly and continue, such learners will surely be successful writers. Haylot (2014) argues, “And it is probably true that giving up on being great would make writing easier for me” (p. 18). Haylot has suggested eight strategies for getting writing done. Following these strategies makes the task of writing easier and helps for being a better academic writer. The strategies move from writing regularly, making small goals and meeting them, continuing even stuck up, avoiding virtuous procrastination, making fear an ally, starting poor and ending rich, treating revision and rewriting equally important, and implementing these strategies in practice.

These strategies help a writer from preparation to implementation in writing. It is the accepted truth that until you write yourself you can never be able to write in a better way. Regular practice leads a writer to perfection. Rather than making big goals and

failing, it is better to formulate small goals, achieve them and move forward. Different obstacles deviate us from the writing task; in such situations, continuity in all cost is essential. We meet various excuses to delay our writing task, what needs is the determination to achieve the goal. In most cases the fear of not being able to write properly stops from writing. In such a situation, what is needed is the inspiration and courage that only mistakes lead us to learning. Moreover, a potential writer should be clear that everyone begins poor but what counts is the effort to end rich and better. Revising is the essential aspect of academic writing and a writer should show readiness for it. So making a plan is necessary, what needs more is implementing the plan in practice or in the task of writing.

Unity, Coherence, and Cohesion

Unity, coherence and cohesion are three essential features of academic writing that are related to linguistic and ideational aspects. If a paragraph deals with a single topic, it maintains unity. In other words, the writer maintains unity by dealing with only one idea in a paragraph. Academic writing is organized as per the logical principles of argumentation. The first sentence of the paragraph introduces the topic and the others present the supporting details. In united form they justify one claim and create an impression.

Apart from unity, coherence and cohesion play a crucial role in maintaining the overall organization of academic writing. Coherence is achieved presenting the interconnectedness at the idea level, and cohesion means connecting ideas at the sentence level. Coherence refers to the writing's rhetorical aspects, including developing and supporting arguments (e.g., thesis statement development), synthesizing and integrating readings, organizing, and clarifying ideas. Cohesion refers to interconnectedness in linguistic level. Using homophones, pun and repetition in different levels cohesion is achieved. In harmonious combination unity, coherence and coherence create beauty in writing.

Simplicity and Precision

One of the crucial aspects of academic writing is its simplicity and precision. At present many writers have the misconception that use of complex jargons make the writing standard but they have forgotten that the primary purpose of the writing is to communicate. The use of appropriate vocabulary as per the need of the

context and issue is accepted but unnecessary use of jargons destroy the beauty of academic writing.

Similarly, communicating the optimum ideas with the use of minimal words is the unique feature of academic writing. To make writing effective the use of unnecessary words and phrases should be avoided. Selection of the words that speak the value of phrases and sentences should be the part of such writing. Its effectiveness appears in the communication of the acute ideas in a precise way.

Organization and Style

Readers expect systematic presentation of ideas in academic writing. So structured writing as per the content is essential. Even a short piece of writing has a regular and predictable pattern of organization. A letter's pattern of organization differs from speech. Mostly, academic writing has the pattern of organization with title, abstract, key words, introductions, literature review, methodology, result and discussion or textual analysis, conclusion and work cited. It is essential for imparting the ideas in a systematic, attractive and effective way. Presentation of the ideas in organized form greatly contributes for achieving the goal of effective communication.

The type of message being communicated and the audience determine the style of academic writing. Formal styles, consistency in tone are essential aspects. Consistency is created by following certain well-defined styles. Academic writing should be knowledge oriented rather than action. It should not show too aggression toward any issue. Ideas should be presented in objective and bias free ways. They differ according to subject and faculties. MLA and APA are two prominent styles used by academic writers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that academic writing is not an arduous task but a task that needs seriousness. If a writer becomes clear about the different components of academic writing, he/she can easily go ahead. Different obstacles that we call writer's blocks are encountered in writing process but they can be easily surpassed by following its process and practice. Multiple aspects of our issue need to be addressed systematically. A writer should keep in mind the type of reader or audience he/she is writing for and align the writing with the purpose. The clarity in purpose helps to move in the right path.

Additionally, a solid understanding of different types of arguments and their appropriate use within specific contexts enhances the effectiveness of writing. A writer can make different strategies and implement them in practice. Maintaining unity and creating cohesion and coherence help for better writing. Simplicity and precision are two prominent aspects for being better in academic writing. Similarly, presentation of the arguments in organized manner following standard style makes the writing systematic. In short, by harmonizing three aspects; reader, writer and the text properly, academic writing can be made effective. It does not need extraordinary skill and ingeniousness.

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