Introducing Academic Genres for Graduate Students

Contents

1. Overview:

This packet introduces learning to write in academic discourse fields. As part of this focus, this packet will address reading the field-specific practices critically. This packet will also suggest a variety of organizational patterns for certain academic genres and offer methods for citing sources appropriately.

2. Goals:

1. Discuss some of common obstacles faced by new graduate workers as they adapt to the conventions of academic English.
2. Present strategies and tools to address common challenges of genre-awareness, composing, paraphrasing, grammar, etc.
3. Workshop models of writing practices to enable utilization of resources you already posses (i.e. multiple language repertoires, cosmopolitan perspectives, social capital, etc.)

3. What is Academic Writing?

The current consensus on academic knowledge, based on antifoundational philosophical deliberations, views such knowledge as field-specific and subject to its own frameworks of reality. Specifically, written knowledge is understood as contextual and relational. Texts aims for an audience and their meanings are always co-constructed between the writer, the text, the audience, and the context.

As they become familiar with their disciplines, supported by material, cognitive, and social resources, graduate workers develop the dispositions, skillsets, practices, etc. of the fields. They "go-native" or negotiate nativeness.

4. Principles of Academic Writing

Academic Writing aims at the creation of knowledge and communication. Rather than thinking of writing in the academy in terms of *belle lettres* – poetry, novel, essays, etc. - it is more accurate to think of as a collective process for specific purposes and towards specific audiences.

The characteristics of academic writing are:

- Communicates knowledge, does not aim to impress.
- Follows discourse field conventions.
- Situates in suitable information.
- Organizes information carefully.
- Keeps discourse-field audiences in mind.
- Credits sources adequately.
- Basis is continuous revision and input from multiple people.

Written to communicate, not to impress:

Academic writing aims to communicate the point that the material and the object of study is interesting. The focus is always on the topic you are presenting rather than on the writer. Good academic writing is "invisible writing." In fact, it is actually detrimental if academic writing tries to appear too clever too often. You do not want to condescend to your audience, who are either your peers or professional superiors.

Follows discourse-field conventions:

Academic writing follows the conventions of its discourse-fields. Whether it is in the form the standard genres used in the field or standard background genres that enable learning, academic writing tries to use the practices of the disciplines efficiently and responsibly. To learn these genres, the most important thing is to imitate the practices of more experienced persons.

One good way to develop this field-awareness is regularly reading journals in your field. Get to know these platforms by talking to your mentors and advisors. They can identify good journals in your field or those journals you ought to publish your work in. Reading the articles, commentaries, and other pieces in these journals will give you a sense of the current state of the field, where it's going, and how to position yourself within it. The recurring list of citations in these journals will also provide you the information you need to know in your own research.

Situated in suitable information:

Your research will be situated in your field in as far as you use its traditionally valued citations, acceptable methods, and targeted objects. You will primarily learn these points by working with mentors in your field. You will also have to glean these points by continuously developing literature reviews. To do this it is critical that you make it a habit of noting sources of information and using citation generators (e.g. Zotero, Mandaley, Evernote, Endnote, etc.). It will save you from having to build a new bibliography each time you start a project. Another good practice is to work with librarians specializing in your fields. You can contact them directly through this link: http://www.libraries.psu.edu/psul/ask.html

Organizes information carefully:

Remember that the literature you review has to be organized into a literature review eventually. Whether this review takes the form of an annotated bibliography or a synchronized section in an article, you can save yourself a lot of time by following an outline or schematic table when you are conducting your research. As Robert A. Day, author of *How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper*, says: "The preparation of a scientific paper has less to do with literary skill than with *organization.*"

Keeps discourse-field audiences in mind:

Always remember that your writing is targeted towards audiences in your field. While the general audience might be the field as such, the immediate audience might be the professor, advisor, or committee members you are working under, or the editor or reviewer for a journal. Get to know these people by reading their works. Subsequently, utilize the work they have done and published to establish communicative common ground with them. They are literate in a set of readings and methods, and communicating with them will be easier if you draw on those sets of knowledge in your own writings.

Credit sources adequately:

In general, citations ought not make up more than ten-fifteen percent of your research articles your write-ups. You need to have read what people have said on your topic, but then incorporate those statements in your own words and arguments.

When you do use others' words, put the materials into quotation marks if it is short, indent if it is long (more than three lines), and always cite your source. The most common citation styles are APA, MLA, and Chicago Style. You can google formatting standards for each. (Look below for some basic tips and notes on citations.)

Based on continuous revision and input from multiple people:

You write well when you treat composing as a process and academic writing is no different. A process view of writing employs outlining, drafting, organizing your drafts into outlines, rewriting, peer-reviewing, and continuous revisions. (Note: always let your second/third drafts sit for a week before you start revising.)

5. Academic Genres: What You need to Know

Academic genres comprise "a class of communicative events" (Swales, 1990, p. 58), made up for common purposes. While all academic fields share common genres, some fields have their own unique writing genres for their requirements, and even the ubiquitous research article takes different forms in different disciplines.

Some of the common academic writing genres are:

The Sciences	The Humanities
Research Articles (strict model)	Research Article (more essayistic)
Lab-reports and record of procedures	Book reviews and review essays
Lecture notes, fieldnotes, bibliographies	Lecture notes, archival notes, annotations and bibliographies
Monographs and multi-author monographs	Monographs
Dissertation and grant proposals	Dissertation and grant proposals
Abstracts, conference papers, and conference proposals	Abstracts, conference papers, and conference proposals
Teaching philosophies, course syllabi, assignment sheets	Teaching philosophies, course syllabi, assignment sheets
Emails	Emails

5.1 The Research Article:

Most research articles in the sciences (i.e. natural or human sciences) follow a strict template. This template can be visualized in the following format, often called the IMRD format:
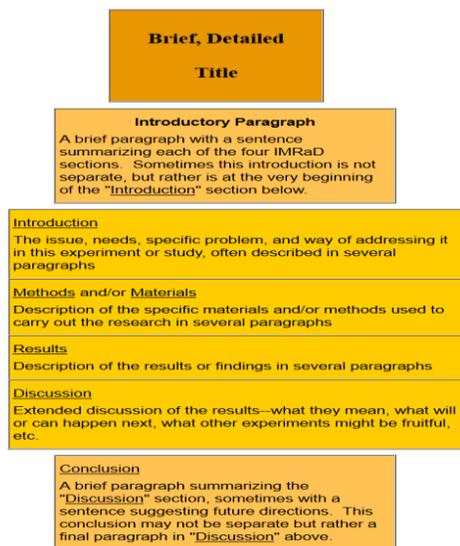
Source: Writingforcollege.org

5.2 Introduction:

Introductions in academic writing articulate the general topic and the research question, as well as provide a literature review and an organizational paragraph. Swales (1990) identified the three moves most articles must make in its introductory section. He explains these moves as "creating a research space."

Creating a Research Space

Adapted from Swales, J. & Feak, C. (1994). *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Moves in Research Paper Introductions

Move 1---Establish a research territory

a.   Show that the research area is important, interesting, problematic, or relevant in some way. (optional)

b.   Introduce and review items of previous research and theory in the area. (obligatory)

Move 2---Establish a niche

a.   Indicate a gap in the previous research, raise a question about it, or extend previous knowledge (obligatory)

Move 3---Occupy a niche

a.   Outline purposes or state the nature of the present research. (obligatory)

b.   Announce principal findings. (optional)

c.   Indicate the structure of the research paper. (optional)

Methods/Methodologies:

In this section you layout how you collect and analyze your data. To this end, you will list the method of your data collection: interviews, field notes, experiments, etc. Your methods/methodologies section might include discussions of how you selected your data, why and how the subjects were chosen, an identification of your equipment, reagents, organisms.

You will then explain how you analyze your data. Analytical lenses are also called methodologies and examples, including ethnographic triangulation, feminist discourse analysis, ANOVA testing, regression, etc. Finally, you will provide the limitations of your analysis.

Results/ Discussions:

The results section lays out and explicates your findings. While it might be tempting to interpret your results, avoid making definitive statements in this section. Academic research does not make definitive statements on findings. Rather, you should communicate an argument on a topic based on your findings. The only mandatory requirement in this section is the factual statement of the results. Brett (2002) groups the typical moves in this section around three kinds of communicative categories: metatextual (text about text), presentation

(objectively report, present, or highlight results), and comment (which interprets, comments on, or states opinions about the results).

- Metatextual categories
    - Pointers (statements that indicate which data is being discussed—i.e. "table one shows")
    - Structure of section
- Presentation categories
    - Procedural (comments that indicate how and why data were produced)
    - Hypothesis restated (may also generate further hypotheses from findings)
    - Statement of findings/results
        - Comparison (between subjects in the study)
        - Time-related change (indicates trends or changes in the subjects over time)
        - Relationship between variables
    - Substantiation of finding
    - Non-validation of finding (indicates data that doesn't support finding)
- Comment categories
    - Explanation of findings
    - Comparison of findings with literature (may indicate the ways in which they are the same different, or neither the same nor different)
    - Evaluation of findings regarding the Hypothesis (whether they confirm the hypothesis or not)
    - Further question(s) raised by findings
    - Implications of finding
    - Summarizing

Upon listing these facts, you are then expected to connect your findings to the published literature in your field in the "discussion" sections. This section, as Penrose and Katz (2010) indicate, explains how the initial research question has been answered (at least in part) by the research presented in the article and suggests how this information represents a legitimate contribution to the field (in other words, this section may situate the results in relation to the results of other researchers). For example, "Published literature. (i.e. xx ([2010]) said this and my findings corroborate/refute/modify that statement." The discussion section includes:

- Background information (may include repetition of main points, reminders, etc.)
- Statement of results
- Reference to previous research
- Explanation (reasons for a particular result)
- Deduction and hypothesis (making a claim about the generalizability of some or all of the results)
- Recommendations for further research (although this move may be decreasing, as researchers are sometimes reluctant to give an advantage to others).

Addendum for the Humanities:

Unlike the sciences, though, a research article in the humanities is less strict and more a "subtly ritualized form of communication" (Fahnestock and Secor, 1991, p. 95). It aims to "judge past performances (evaluate texts), implies future work (what to teach)…. create[s] and reinforce[s] communities of scholars sharing the same values." What this means is that, unlike scientific writing, writing in the humanities is more explicitly value-laden. It is about presenting an essay that is simultaneously aesthetic and communicative.

5.3 Exercise: Identifying Moves in a Research Paper Introduction (20 minutes)

Read the following sample research paper introduction and, working with a partner, answer the questions following it.

The Position of Sentence Connectors in Academic English
C. B. Feak and J. M. Swales

Introduction

Many commentators have noted that sentence connectors (e.g., however) are an important and useful element in expository and argumentative writing. Frequency studies of their occurrence in academic English extend at least as far back as Huddleston (1971). ESL writing textbooks have for many years regularly included chapters on sentence connectors (e.g. Herber, 1965). Most reference grammars deal with their grammatical status, classification, meaning, and use. Some attention has also been given to the position of sentence connectors in clauses and sentences. Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) observe (a) that the normal position is initial; (b) that certain connectors, such as hence and overall, "are restricted, or virtually restricted, to initial position" (p. 248); and (c) that medial positions are rare for most connectors, and final positions even rarer. The only attempt known to us to explain differences in position on semantic grounds is an unpublished paper by Salera (1976) discussed by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983). The Salera paper deals only with adversatives like *however* and suggests that initial position reflects something contrary to expectation, while medial position reflects a contract that is not necessarily unexpected. However, neither of these studies provides any descriptive evidence of the actual positions of sentence connectors in academic texts. In the present paper, we report on a preliminary study of sentence connector position in a sample of twelve published articles.

1. Divide the text into the three basic moves based on the table above.
2. Where in the introduction would you divide Move 1 into 1a and 1b?
3. What kind of Move 2 do we use?
4. What kind of Move 3a do we use?
5. Underline any words or expressions in sentences 1 through 3 used to establish research territory?

5.4 The Abstract:

An abstract is a stand-alone statement that briefly conveys the essential information of a paper, article, document or book; presents the objective, methods, results, and

conclusions of a research project; has a brief, non-repetitive style. The abstract is an important genre to master because you will generally submit an abstract for conference applications rather than the actual paper.

An abstract of a paper or presentation should:

- Describe the objective, methods, results, conclusions.
- Detail descriptions of methods.
- Avoid reference to other literatures.

5.5 Exercise: Identify the answers provided by a functional Abstract.

Read the following abstract and identify the objectives, methods, results, and conclusions. How detailed are the descriptions of the methods? Does it posit an innovative articulation of methods or analysis of findings? How might it be rephrased to make communicate that the findings will add something to the field? Why do you think it goes out of its way to avoid citations?

Abstract

This study's objective was to determine the strangeness measurements for red, green, and blue quarks. The Britt-Cushman method for quark analysis exploded a quarkstream in a He gas cloud. Results indicate that both red and green quarks had a strangeness that differed by less than $0.453 \times 10\text{-}17$ Zabes/m2 for all measurements. Blue quarks remained immeasurable, since their particle traces bent into 7-tuple space. This study's conclusions indicate that red and green quarks can be used interchangeably in all He stream applications, and further studies must be done to measure the strangeness of blue quarks.

Tips on writing an abstract

1. Highlight the **objective and the conclusions** from the longer paper's **introduction and discussion sections**.
2. Bracket information in the **methods section** of the paper that contains **keyword** information.
3. Highlight the **results from the discussion or results section** of the paper.
4. **Compile** the above highlighted and bracketed information into a single paragraph. Do not explain the methods.
5. **Condense the bracketed** information into the key words and phrases that identify but do not explain the methods used.
6. **Delete** extra words, phrases, and background information.
7. **Rephrase** the first sentence so that it starts off with the **new information contained** in the paper, rather than with the general topic. **One way of doing this is to begin the first sentence with the phrase "this paper" or "this study."**
8. **Revise the paragraph** so that the abstract conveys the essential information.