



NATIONAL ART SCHOOL

MFA1 – Seminar 2 2020

Academic writing

The fundamentals



Academic English skills for MFA students

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One-on-one appointments for writing support



Exercise

What is wrong with this paragraph?

How can it be improved?

Although my paintings are made with oils, because they have no calculated intention beyond what they overtly portray, my theoretical interests can be seen to be the focus. The techniques I use in the making of my paintings are determined to secure my idea. I use the method of oils because it offers me advantages in terms of technique, but it also supports me theoretically.





Academic writing conventions

- A consistent, formal layout
- Formal language ✓
- Focuses on specifics/avoids generalisations ✓
- Is explicit (ideas are stated rather than implied) ✓
- Follows a line of logic ✓
- Opinions are founded on research
- It seeks to question or analyse
- Statements are supported with evidence ✓





Academic writing conventions

Academic writing is formal:

- Avoids, where possible, relying on everyday words, terms and phrases
- Avoids generalisations, emphasises specifics
- Uses technical and theoretical terminology





Academic writing conventions

Academic writing (mostly) avoids colloquialisms & idioms:

Colloquialism

A word or phrase used in ordinary conversation, including slang (e.g. 'great big', 'amazing', 'awesome', 'winner', 'very talented')

Idiom

A phrase or figure of speech with a metaphorical rather than literal meaning (e.g. 'He bought it.', 'She's pushing up daisies.')



Exercise

Colloquialisms & idioms

Can you re-write this sentence?



Seurat's **last study** for his **most massive** painting **involves** Parisians **lounging and relaxing** on an island in the Seine.





Exercise

Informal/colloquial:

Seurat's **last** study for his **most massive** painting **involves** Parisians **lounging about** on an island in the Seine.

Formal/academic:

The **final** study for the **largest** of Seurat's paintings **depicts** Parisians **at leisure** on an island in the Seine.





Academic writing conventions

Academic writing is specific:

Example of an overview (often found in introductions)

Too general:

There have been many discussions about contemporary art from lots of points of view, some positive and some negative.

Specific:

‘Discussion of contemporary art, ranging from specialist journal to tabloid column, encompasses respectful exegesis, complex philosophical diversions, fawning publicity, and finally denunciation, ridicule and dismissal.’ *

*Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 1.





Academic writing conventions

Academic writing is specific:

Giving historical background

Too general

The word 'diaspora' has been used throughout history to describe migrants who have colonised different parts of the world.

Specific:

'The word *diaspora* originates from ancient Greek, (*speiro* – to sow, *dia* – over) meaning a scattering or sowing of seeds over a wide area. For the ancient Greeks, the term was used to describe the colonization of Asia Minor and the Mediterranean in the Archaic period 800–600 BCE.'*

* Gali Weiss, 'The Anonymous Portrait: A Creative and Critical Investigation of Diaspora', PhD thesis, Victoria University 2008.





Constructing a logical argument

Academic writing is explicit:

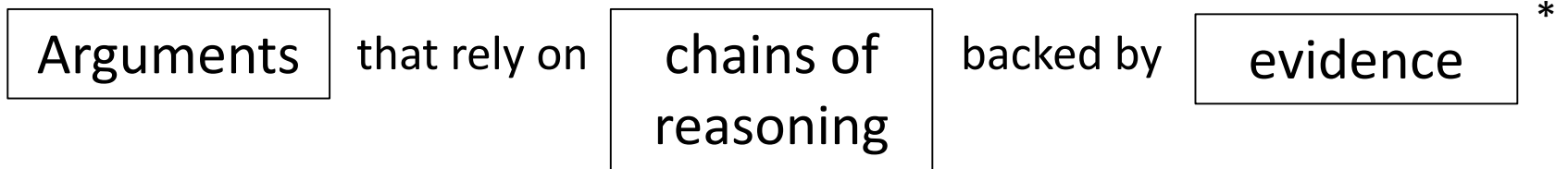
- Explain what you intend to demonstrate, argue and/or achieve
- Explain relationships and connections
- Spell out the implications
- Inform the reader of your conclusions





Constructing a logical argument

Academic arguments can often be recognised by their internal structure:



*Introduction to Academic Communication 2 700210/900108 2018 Student Workbook. Western Sydney University Enterprises Pty Ltd (p. 20).





Constructing a logical argument

The TEEL method

- A simple explanation of internal paragraph logic
- Not relevant in every case, but a good start

T – topic line

E – explanation or extrapolation

E – evidence

L – linking line (links to next paragraph or refers back to topic line)



Examples

Julian Stallabrass – *The Gargantuan* (page 28)

Heta Pyrhönen - *Imagining the impossible: the erotic poetics of Angela Carter's 'Bluebeard' stories* (pages 94 & 97)

- How do Stallabrass and Pyrhönen set up their ‘chains of reasoning’?
- Do they explain relationships and connections? If so, how?
- Do they explain implications?
- Do they use linking sentences?
- How do they introduce their evidence?

Both authors discuss contentious issues

- Are they taking a position?
- How might you frame an argument that agrees with their point of view?
- How might you frame an argument that disagrees?