



University of  
Roehampton  
London



# Academic Writing, including Academic Tone

Academic Achievement Team  
[AATeam@Roehampton.ac.uk](mailto:AATeam@Roehampton.ac.uk)



# The Academic Achievement Team

We're here to help you become confident, independent learners.

Our **Learning Skills Hub** page on Moodle has [online resources](#), details of our [workshops](#), [lunchtime drop-in sessions](#) and lots more...



[AATeam@Roehampton.ac.uk](mailto:AATeam@Roehampton.ac.uk)



[@UR\\_Library](https://twitter.com/UR_Library)



# Aims

**By the end of this session, we hope you will have:**

- Developed an understanding of (or recapped on) academic writing conventions such as:
  - Formality
  - Being objective
  - Caution
  - Conciseness
- Explored ways to tackle challenges, using active reading and editing techniques



# Books

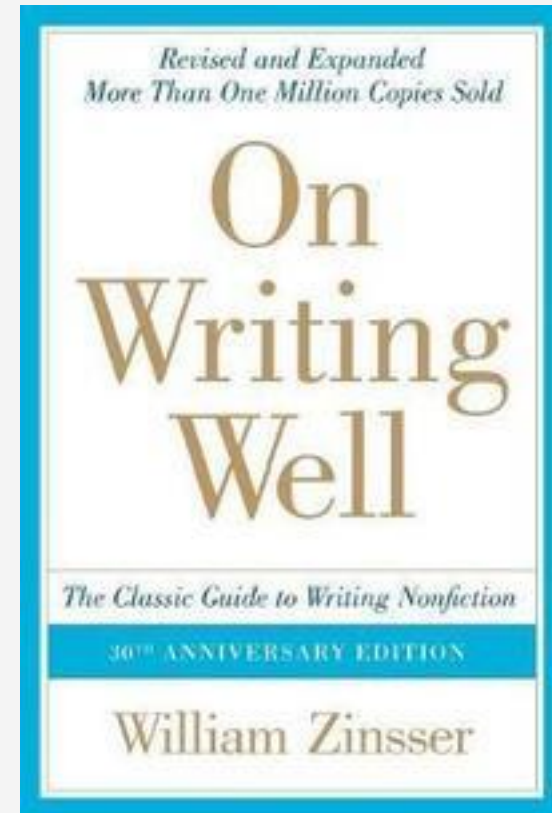
Before we start I want to introduce you to two books you might find helpful.

## 1) On Writing Well

This book was recommended to me by one of our Roehampton lecturers who teaches on our PGCE programmes with English specialism. It is a fantastic guide.

You can look this up in the library catalogue, we have several copies on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor.

**Shelf-mark: 808.042/ZIN**





# Books

Before we start I want to introduce you to two books you might find helpful.

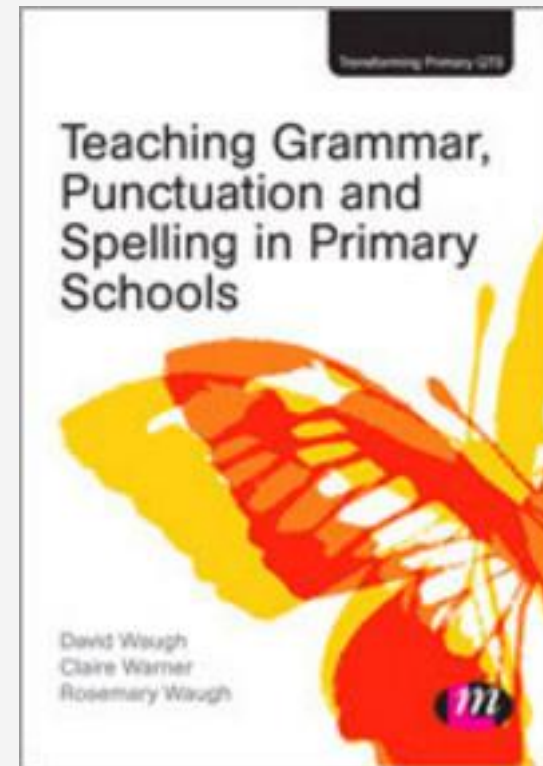
## 2) Teaching Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling in Primary Schools

You do *not* need to be a teacher to benefit from picking up A copy of this book. It has a very helpful grammar and punctuation section.

Many students feel the need for a refresher, but can sometimes feel nervous about admitting this. There are lots of us in this boat, so don't be afraid to revisit the basics!

(Esp. chapters 6, 7, 8, 9)

**Shelf-mark: 428.007/WAU**







# First: An Activity

Read the handout ('Calling all Students').

*Do you think mobile phones should be banned in schools?*

Write a paragraph stating what you think and why.

Please treat the task as an academic piece of writing.

You have 5 minutes!



Created by Guillaume Tardif  
Yves Fassin Project





# Discussion

## Feedback



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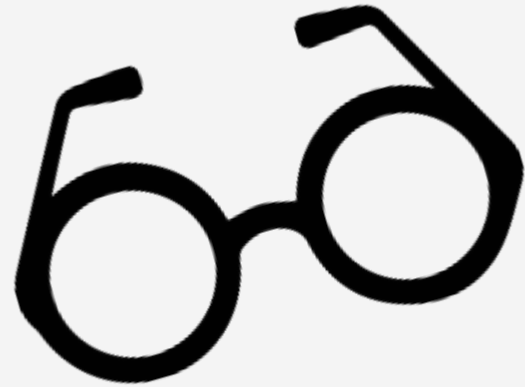
What did you find  
challenging?

What would you like to  
find out about  
academic writing?



## Activity 2

Look at the second handout, and talk to the person next to you about what makes these pieces *not* academic writing.



Created by Roselin Christina.S  
from Noun Project





# Discussion

## Feedback



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What is academic  
writing for?

And who is it for?



# Academic writing conventions

- Introductions, evaluative discussions, conclusions
- Clarity: explaining things so that others can understand
- Precision: as opposed to *vagueness*
- Formality: on a scale from semi-formal to very formal – but not *informal*
- Succinct: again on a scale
- Clear intentions: *why* are you writing this, *why* should others read it?
- Vocabulary: carefully chosen to aid with precision and succinctness
- Correct use of grammar
- Caution



# Writers are Readers

The best way to improve your writing is to read!



# Writers are Readers

- Read widely – lots of different styles





# Writers *study* their reading

- With active reading we read the same piece several times.
- Each time we read the piece we do so with a specific focus.
- Make notes. What have you learnt?



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# Writers *study* their reading

When we do several readings to find inspiration for *improving our writing*, we focus on style choices, expression, and other literary elements.

Style

Vocabulary

Intentional devices

Grammar

Voice

**Sentence Structure**





# Writers *study* their reading

It's hard to scrutinise every aspect all at once. So we may focus on one or two at a time.

For example:

**Reading 1:** vocabulary and intention

**Reading 2:** sentence structure

(etc)



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# Activity: Grade their paper

- Pick **a para or two** from each of the selected readings. These are all examples of high quality academic writing.
- Scrutinise, in turn, each of these:
  - *Sentence structure, especially length*
  - *Vocabulary*
  - *Pace*
  - *Punctuation*
  - *Style*
- Give the paper a mark out of 10!

You have **10 minutes**





# Writers *consciously acquire* new words

- Keep a word diary.
- **Tip!** It doesn't have to be just for words.
- You can also note transitions or turns of phrase that you pick up from your reading.
- *(Make sure they are not the author's originals!)*





# Resources and tools

MANCHESTER  
1824

The University of Manchester

## Academic Phrasebank

Introducing Work

Referring to Sources

Describing Methods

Reporting Results

Discussing Findings

Writing Conclusions

### GENERAL LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS

Being Critical

Being Cautious

Classifying and Listing

Compare and Contrast

Defining Terms

Describing Trends

Describing Quantities

Explaining Causality

Giving Examples

Signalling Transition

Writing about the Past

- <http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>
- <http://www.freecollocation.com/search?word=reason>
- <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/despite>
- Hull University has a great online activity to practise: [Sounding academic](#) activity.
- <http://www.uefap.com/writing/feature/hedge.htm> (cautious language)
- <http://library.bcu.ac.uk/learner/writingguides/1.20.htm>
  - formal vs informal

### ABOUT PHRASEBANK

An enhanced and expanded version of PHRASEBANK can now be downloaded in PDF:





# Testing our editing skills



**10% inspiration**

**90% perspiration**

The majority of the polished pieces we read have in fact undergone a rigorous editing process involving several stages.



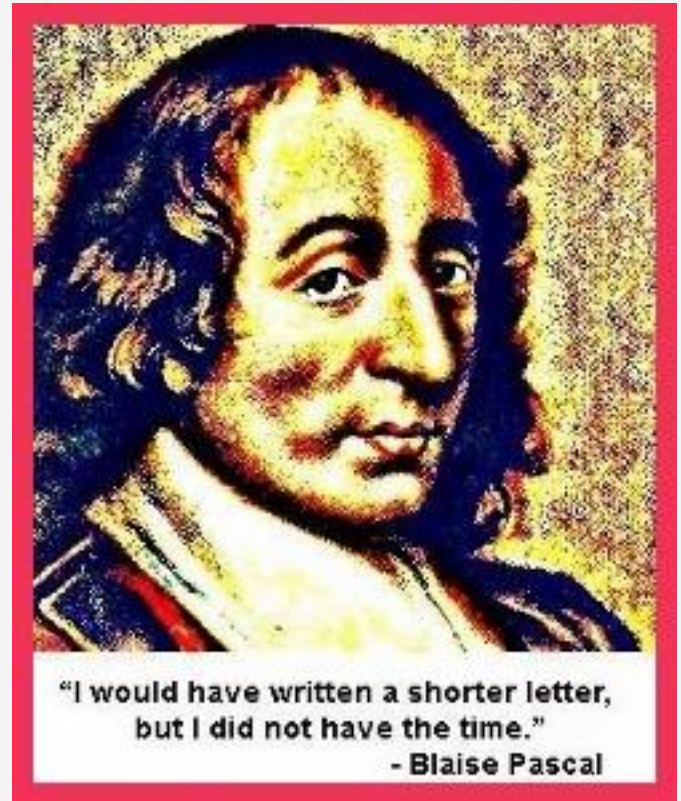


# Testing our editing skills

*“The present letter is a very long one, simply because I had no leisure to make it shorter.”*

– Blaise Pascal

(17<sup>th</sup> C. mathematician, writer, inventor)







# Testing our editing skills

**Write freely. Edit rigorously.**

You will probably spend more time editing your piece than you spent writing it.

Break the editing work down into stages, each with a focus.

Let's have a go at improving some sentences>>





# Colloquialisms

Colloquialisms are words or phrases that we use in everyday conversation and informal situations.

- Avoid slang, chatty and text talk in your writing.
- Use formal English and clear language.



## Colloquialisms example

- Research into learning (higher education) carried out by people like Biggs, Ramsden, Marton and his Scandinavian workmates points the way towards considering the question of the nature of learning in higher education according to two, different approaches (surface and deep learning) adopted by students in universities, let us first have a look at motivation.
- Drawing on research into learning in higher education (Biggs, 1987; Ramsden, 1992; Marton *et al.*, 1997), there appears to be a qualitative distinction between two opposed approaches to learning: deep and surface.



## Colloquialism and Cliché (Test)

**Think of less ‘chatty’ alternatives for the following statements.**

- In this day and age, websites are one of the most significant public faces of any organisation.
- The long-term prospects for the educational service are looking fairly bleak at this moment in time.
- The authorities announced that they would not tolerate drugs within the sport in any way, shape, or form.



# Objectivity

Be objective rather than subjective.

- Avoid personal pro-nouns such as 'I', 'we' and 'you'. Instead use, for example:

**It can be seen that.../It has been found that.../This paper argues...**

- 'I think' and 'I feel' are conversational and should not be used unless you are writing a Reflective piece.



## Objectivity (test)

- I think that Maslow's theory is not very well thought out because he did not work with large groups of participants.
- In my opinion the book says that 'authority is a key aspect of social conformity'.
- In this paper I will explore Bowlby's theories of attachment





# Caution

Academic writing is cautious, because many things are uncertain.

When we put forward an argument, point of view or claim, we know that it can probably be contested and that not everybody would necessarily agree with it.

We use words and phrases that express lack of certainty, such as:

Appears to

Seems to

Might

The evidence suggests that...

Tends to

May indicate

In some cases this...

This could be because



# Caution (test)

- a) The above graph demonstrates that a greater number of employees worked flexible hours within the organisation in 2017 than they did in any preceding year. This clearly shows that people in the UK prefer to vary their work patterns.
  
- b) Nagel obviously thinks that consciousness is a separate entity from our minds, because no matter how many facts we know about bats, we still do not know what it feels like to *be* one.
  
- c) Klofstad argues that citizens dislike political conflict (2013). However, this is patently untrue as evidenced by the popularity of arguing about politics on Twitter.



# Be precise.

Be clear and specific. The following sentence is vague:

**‘Some people did not like the idea at the time, tried to make the politicians stop it, and then attacked him publicly.’**

It is vague because we are unsure as to what the pronouns (it, him) and other words (some people, the idea, at the time, the politicians) point to.

A more precise alternative might be:

**‘76% of peers in the House of Lords (*some people*) were against banning foxhunting (*the idea*) in 1996 (*at the time*), tried to prevent the government (*the politicians*) from proceeding with the policy (*it*), and then attacked the Prime Minister (*him*) publicly.’**



# Be concise

- Avoid using overcomplicated sentences. For example, the following sentence is too wordy:

**‘The research project envisages the significant utilisation of both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, namely questionnaire surveys, in-depth interviews and small focus groups.’**

- A more concise alternative might be:

**‘This research project will be using qualitative and quantitative methods, specifically questionnaires, interviews and focus groups.’**



# Be concise (test)

- The social psychologists Stanley Milgram in 1961 and Philip Zimbardo in 1971 conducted significant experiments on social influence on obedient behaviour.
- Sanderson (1963) was motivated by a report on the trial of the Nazi Adolf Eichman which suggested that the worst evils are often carried out by the most ordinary of people. He wanted to conduct a study to find out if many of those under Nazi influence could have simply been following orders as they had claimed.
- The report on the study found, much to the dismay of the researcher and the observers, that the participants went far beyond the expected levels of obedience.



# Style

- Numbers are tricky. Here is a good guide:  
[http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/exercises/grammar/grammar\\_tutorial/page\\_33.htm](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/exercises/grammar/grammar_tutorial/page_33.htm)
- Do not start sentences with conjunctions: or, and, but, yet.
- Avoid contractions: can't = cannot, I'll = I will, didn't = did not, won't = will not.
- Do not abbreviate: dept = department, e.g. = for example.
- Use transitional words carefully according to their meaning: however, furthermore, moreover, indeed, therefore.
- If you are not sure: check!





# Edit schedule

- Following a draft, our first edits are usually focussed on the structure (i.e., the arrangement of our thoughts and arguments).
- At some point however, we need to *stop* altering our structure, and *start* focusing on editing for expression.

A schedule of revisions might look like:

- 1: Essay structure
- 2: Essay structure
- 3: Precision
- 4: Conciseness, sentence structure
- 5: Grammar, punctuation, spelling
- 6: Final checks and proof reading



# Edit schedule

As we've done throughout this session, when performing each 'edit' we focus on just one or two aspects at a time.

We also:

- Read *one sentence at a time*.
- Consider alternatives / corrections for that sentence.
- Make decisions and if necessary any amendments for that sentence.
- Only then, move on to the next sentence.

**Tip:** Try not to move too quickly when editing. It takes time.

Try not to get distracted by other aspects. Stay focussed on the one you are dealing with now. If you're worried you'll forget, highlight the word/sentence for later attention.



# Activity

## An email from a student to her Tutor

Dear, XXX

hello XXX im one of your personal tutee in xxx course year1.

firstly, thank you for todays lecture :) it was clear and i could understand well and today i got my essay back, there were many mistakes :( some of them, i couldnt understand and expecially in bibliography.

can i have an appointment with u?

i want to review the problems with you about this essay when you have a time, please let me know Thank you very much and take care

Best wishies



# Summary

## Today we have:

- Developed an understanding of (or recapped on) academic writing conventions such as:
  - Formality
  - Being objective
  - Caution
  - Conciseness
- Explored ways to tackle challenges, using active reading and editing techniques



# Questions



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from Noun Project

# Any Questions?



# Academic Achievement Team

Find us in just two clicks:

Moodle → Learning Skills Hub

Or email: [AATeam@Roehampton.ac.uk](mailto:AATeam@Roehampton.ac.uk)