

Good Academic Writing Brainstorming and Tips**Useful vocabulary for talking about academic writing and understanding tasks**

What is good academic writing?

Draw a circle around the words below and then brainstorm a mind map on the topic.

good academic writing

Look on the next page if you need suggestions for what to put on the mind map.

Possible suggestions for the main categories on the mind map

Culture

Influence

Interest/ Readability

Language (grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, etc)

Objectivity

Organisation

Persuasiveness/ Strength of arguments

Process (planning etc)

Publication

Readership

Style

Time management

Topic

Look at the next page when you need help to extend your discussion.



Possible subcategories

- Abbreviations (e.g. acronyms)
- Academic vocabulary (e.g. the Academic Word List)
- Affixes (= prefixes and suffixes)
- Appendices
- Bibliography/ List of references
- Brackets
- British/ American English
- Bullet points/ Numbering
- Chapters/ Sections
- Citations/ Quotations
- Colons/ Semi-colons
- Conclusion/ Summary
- Contractions
- Counterarguments/ Counterexamples
- Dash
- Data/ Figures/ Statistics
- Defining your terms
- Determiners
- Diagram (e.g. line graph, pie chart)
- Drafts
- Editing/ Proofreading
- Evidence/ Supporting arguments
- Exclamation marks
- Fixed phrases/ Idioms
- Footnotes
- Headings
- Introduction
- Jargon
- Latinate vocabulary
- Linking (e.g. linking expressions like “Furthermore”)
- Mind map
- Paragraphs
- Paraphrasing
- Passive
- Personal pronouns
- Questions/ Rhetorical questions
- Title
- Topic sentence

Check the meaning of any words above that you aren't sure of, particularly differences between them.

What would your advice be on the topics above? Ask your partner about one you aren't sure about and see what they say.

Ask your partner, another group and then the whole class about any topics above you have any doubts about.

Discuss if the advice below is good or not and put a tick, cross or ? if you aren't sure or it depends next to each one.

1. Academic papers often have a title with two parts separated by a colon to catch your attention, give useful information about what is in the paper, and use lots of key words
2. Academic vocabulary tends to consist of longer Latinate words, often with affixes
3. Appendices are generally better than footnotes
4. Avoid abbreviations
5. Avoid colons and, especially, semi-colons where possible, because even native speakers tend to use them badly
6. Avoid jargon
7. Avoid one-sentence paragraphs
8. Avoid repeating words
9. Avoid rhetorical questions
10. Avoid starting sentences with “and” and “but”
11. Being difficult to understand is likely to have the most impact on the score of any marked academic writing
12. Contractions are too informal for much academic writing
13. Dashes are too informal for much academic writing
14. Decide on both the main readership and wider possible readership of a paper before writing it, and particularly before choosing a title
15. Exclamation marks are very informal
16. Explain the organisation of your writing in the introduction
17. Idioms are often informal
18. It can be useful to think of the title of an academic paper as being similar to that of a webpage that is trying to get as many Google hits and readers as possible
19. It can help to keep a list of your own common errors to check your writing against
20. Lots of different support for your arguments is usually better than detailed examination of one kind of support for your argument, particularly in writing with time or word limits
21. Make changes to a second draft in the main text and delete all macros (comment boxes etc) before submitting it again
22. Most non-native English speakers use too few determiners (a, an, the, etc). In English the default is to use something, and you need a special reason to use nothing.
23. Most publications have their own criteria about what written style to use
24. One paragraph is one topic, so a new paragraph means a new topic (in some way)
25. Only sources which are cited in the paper should be included in the list of references
26. Quoting directly is always better than paraphrasing
27. The editing stage is also a good chance to add more complex language, especially if you can get feedback afterwards on how well you used it
28. The first person (= “I”) is never acceptable in academic writing
29. The more references the better
30. Tips on using most kinds of punctuation (brackets, commas, semi-colons, etc) varies depending on British or American English, which style guide, publication, which expert's advice you look at, etc.
31. Try to be consistent with use of British and American English
32. Use as many linking expressions as possible
33. Use passives whenever possible, for example lots of phrases like “It is said that...” and “... is considered to be...”

Can you change the advice above which is bad to make it better?

Add ideas from above to your mind map.

Compare your mind map another group and then discuss the questions below.

Discussion

- Which of the things on your mind map are most difficult and most important? How could you improve your ability to do those things?
- How can you use brainstorming and mind maps in academic writing? What other ways of coming up with ideas are there?
- Do you think your mind map is a good example? What could be improved about it?
- Your homework will be to write a 300 word essay on the topic of good academic writing. How useful do you think the mind map you created today could be?
- What else will you need to do before you start writing that essay?
- What should the rest of the process consist of?

Homework

Write the essay described above, making sure it is also an example of good academic writing, especially:

- Defining your terms
- Including references
- Planning

Please write a plan at the top of the page before you start writing and include that in the homework you submit to your teacher.

Suggested answers

Bad advice

Avoid abbreviations – **Avoid informal abbreviations such as “asap” and “lol”, and explain all other abbreviations the first time you use them**

Avoid jargon – **Jargon is very useful because it usually has a more precise meaning than everyday English terms, but define all jargon the first time you use it.**

Quoting directly is always better than paraphrasing – **Use a mix of quoting and paraphrasing, making it obvious which is which. However, too much direct quoting can lead to copyright concerns and you need to show that you understand and have critically examined any things you quote directly**

The first person (= “I”) is never acceptable in academic writing – **It depends on the publication and field, but “I” is becoming more acceptable.**

The more references the better – **Many publications now limit the number of references you can give, and it can be seen as trying too hard to impress without necessarily having original ideas of your own.**

Use as many linking expressions as possible – **Good writing should be understandable without too many linking expressions, and you should avoid repeating the actual expressions you use (which becomes difficult if you use too many)**

Use passives whenever possible, for example lots of phrases like “It is said that...” and “... is considered to be...” – **Use a mix of passive and active voice, using the latter whenever appropriate. The passive can be useful to avoid “I” if that is necessary, but avoid expressions like “It is thought that...” unless you can say who by.**