

Learning Writing Skills

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A few open questions

- When do we write?
- Why do we write?
- Is it necessary for you to have the ideas fully formed in your mind before you start writing?

Introspect on your own writing

- Reflective writing (example, journaling)
- Writing as a habit that helps you learn, recall experiences and grow..
- Writing to communicate (letters, essays, reports...)
- Writing to exercise creativity (poetry, short stories, novels...)
- How about writing in social media? Typing text messages?

Five Practices to Cultivate to Become a Writer

1. [Courage](#)
2. Thinking
3. Reading
4. Openness to feedback
5. Editing and revising

Considered this idea

- You don't write after completing thinking; writing helps you think. (Don't worry about grammar as soon as you have a writing task.)

A few necessary preliminaries

- Language (and, naturally, writing) as a code
- Working with multiple ‘sign systems’
- The connection between reading and writing

The Question of Truth

→ Is fiction entirely a lie?

*Richer and more varied than the sciences; the world of experiences

→ Is science entirely real?

*Goes much smaller than and beyond the visible world; laws, causal relations; space and time; complex numbers

Sundar Sarukkai (2007) "Literary Reality and Scientific Fiction"
Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature, 44. pp. 47-66.

Features of Good Writing

- Clarity
- Concreteness
- Evidence
- Sentences that communicate (short and active sentences help)
 - Check this video on “Stylish Academic Writing” by Helen Sword: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQsRvAVSVeM>

Make a distinction at the outset

- Content (What are you writing about and how are you organising it?)
- Mechanics of language (spelling, capitalisation, punctuation, grammar).
- We will first deal with the content and later move on to the mechanics.

A few Useful Comparisons

- Writing as describing your perceptions and thoughts
- Writing as a play (game)
- Writing as controlling a boat

The 'Essay' Format

- The predominant form of informative (written) communication
- Linear in structure
- Can we imagine other forms of informative communication?

Types of Essays

- Reflective
- Descriptive
- Analytic

Organising Your Writing

- Mind maps
- Free writing
- The importance of practice

Academic Writing

- Serious, non-personal
- Formal, clear
- Balance between descriptive and analytical approaches
- Avoid vagueness
- Avoid intensifiers like *very*, *extremely*, *abysmally*... (all these are imprecise)
- Provide footnotes (or end notes) and references

Time for an Activity

1. Write a paragraph about a daily experience.
2. Write a paragraph about a topic in your own specific discipline.

Academic writing in different disciplines

- Natural Sciences
- Humanities
- Social Sciences

In the Natural Sciences

- Clear research question
- Use of experimental evidence, logic, mathematics...
- Use of illustrative images
- Discussion of an interesting study on scientific writing
[Canagarajah, S. (2018). Materializing competence: Perspectives from international STEM scholars. *Modern Language Journal*, 102 , 1–24.]

In the Humanities

- Arts, languages, history
- Focus
- Clarity
- More expository than scientific writing
- Attention to evidence and counter-evidence

In the Social Sciences

- Clear research question
- Relating the study to relevant social and political categories
- Weighing evidence and counter-evidence
- Objectivity, acknowledging the limitations

Referencing Styles: A Glance

- MLA Style
- Chicago Manual of Style
- APA Style
- Vancouver Style

Some Examples

MLA

Frank, H. "Wolves, Dogs, Rearing and Reinforcement: Complex Interactions Underlying Species Differences in Training and Problem-Solving Performance." *Behavior Genetics* 41.6 (2011): 830-39. Print.

Chicago Manual of Style

Frank, H. 2011. "Wolves, Dogs, Rearing and Reinforcement: Complex Interactions Underlying Species Differences in Training and Problem-Solving Performance." *Behavior Genetics* 41 (6):830-839.

American Psychological Association

Frank, H. (2011). *Wolves, Dogs, Rearing and Reinforcement: Complex Interactions Underlying Species Differences in Training and Problem-Solving Performance*. *Behavior Genetics*, 41(6), 830-839.

Vancouver Referencing Style

Frank, H. Wolves, Dogs, Rearing and Reinforcement: Complex Interactions Underlying Species Differences in Training and Problem-Solving Performance. *Behavior Genetics*. 2011; 41(6): 830-839.

Sources for the previous slide

<https://libguides.brown.edu/citations/styles>

<https://guides.library.uq.edu.au/referencing/vancouver/journals>

A very useful resource

Online Writing Lab at Purdue University: <https://owl.purdue.edu/>

On the Mechanics of Language

- Grammar
 - Common errors: subject-verb agreement, tenses
- Punctuation
 - Pay attention to the uses of commas, full-stops, semi-colons, hyphens, dashes, colons..

However, don't forget rhetoric

- Rhetoric, the art of persuasion: an essential part of all writing
- Facts are raw data + interpretation: you never have pure data, not even in natural sciences