

PART 1

WRITING AND RESEARCH: GETTING STARTED



SEVEN STAGES OF THE WRITING PROCESS

The two most engaging powers of an author: new things are made familiar, and familiar things are made new.

Samuel Johnson

Academic writing is a process. It is a sequence of stages. You go through these stages cognitively as you take each step in the process of creating the finished product: the essay, the lab report, the summary, or another type of text. At each step, you engage critically with new ideas to address a problem or answer your question. Following the words of the great English writer Samuel Johnson, to be successful in writing, you need to find new ideas and make them understandable to your reader while adding new perspectives to your reader's existing knowledge.

In this chapter, you will:

- read a journal article about multilingual students' experiences of academic writing
- learn four strategies for dealing with academic vocabulary
- practise using formal and informal vocabulary
- study tense and aspect in English
- study seven key stages of the writing process
- analyze the use of personal language in academic writing
- write about your background and writing style

TASK 1 EXPLORE THROUGH WRITING

What kind of writer are you?

When you do exploratory writing, the main purpose is to generate ideas about the topic. The style of the writing is less important; just try to write down as many ideas as possible. Take five minutes. After you have finished, share your notes with peers.

MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS AND ACADEMIC WRITING

In the following article, the authors analyze how students in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program deal with their writing assignments. The authors focus on three multilingual students and examine how their understanding changed as they did research and writing during their first year of university. The following are excerpts from the writing samples and interviews with two of the participants in the study: Fei and Laura.

What Our Students Tell Us: Perceptions of Three Multilingual Students on Their Academic Writing in First Year

by Janne Morton, Neomy Storch, and Celia Thompson

Fei is a Chinese student who at the time of the study was 20 years old and had been living in Australia for more than two years. After finishing her secondary education in China, Fei had “repeated” the last two years of education at an Australian high school. Fei lived with her family in Australia and only spoke Cantonese at home. At university, she was enrolled in an Economics and Business degree, majoring in Marketing and Management, and taking subjects such as Introductory Macroeconomics, Finance, Marketing, Organisational Behaviour, and Academic English: Economics and Business. . . . Fei . . . went on to successfully complete all subjects in the second semester, and by taking extra subjects in the summer semester, was able to graduate with a degree within three years. . . .

At the start of this study, Fei’s description of what academic writing meant to her focused on technical vocabulary and simple overall structure of an assignment:

good academic writing is meant to present high-level knowledge by efficient use of academic vocabulary . . . a group of non-popular words that are specially used in academic reports and professional speeches . . . academic assignments need to have an introduction body conclusion. (First Writing Task)

She added that when writing an academic assignment:

I spend most of my time on looking up in the dictionary and forming academic-style sentences. (Interview 1)

Over the duration of her first year, Fei’s understanding shifted to one that saw writing in the academy as more complex and as much about process as product. In her mid-year interview, she spoke of the importance of:

picking up key words in instructions . . . guessing words in a paragraph by looking at the topic sentence . . . “parawriting” because teachers tell us it’s not good to use many quotes because someone has done much effort for original writing and you need to give more detail to show you understand. (Interview 3)

Point out the spelling of *organisational*: standard Australian spelling calls for an *s*, as in British English and in contrast to the North American *z* (*organizational*).

Excerpts from the article are in their original form, without corrections to grammar or vocabulary.

Perhaps Fei meant *paraphrasing* or *patchwriting* here.

By the end of the year, her focus was on the choice of sources and their effect
30 on potential readers:

I need to find suitable research sources and to incorporate these to fit cohesively with my own words and . . . to be traced by the reader. (Interview 5)

as well as on her developing meta-awareness of how rhetorical differences in the subjects she **was studying** influenced the selection of appropriate sources:

35 *Assignments in Management are relevant to a lot of theories that might be hard to find online but described in academic books frequently. Accordingly, to organise a good research-based Management assignment, students should reference more from academic books. Finance 1 assignments might rely on online material because you need to talk about real life and environment outside*
40 *the university. (Final Writing Task) . . .*

The third student is Laura, who was born in Brazil and at the time of this study, was aged 25 **having already lived** in Australia for five years. She was thus a little older than Fei and Kevin and **had spent** more time in an English-speaking country than either of them. Laura described herself as a speaker
45 of Portuguese (“first” language), Spanish (“second” language) and English (“third” language), but a writer of Portuguese and English only. She **had been educated** in Portuguese and Spanish in primary and secondary school, with some of her secondary education delivered in English. In Australia, Laura lived with her Brazilian husband and spoke Portuguese at home. At university, Laura
50 was enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts degree, and in her first year she successfully completed subjects in a broad range of Arts disciplines including: Medieval History, Philosophy, Politics and Economics, Academic English 2 (first semester), and Ecological History of Humanity, Second Language Teaching and Learning, and International Relations (second semester). . . .

55 For Laura, the main challenge of academic writing was how to construct an effective academic identity for herself in her writing. . . . Throughout the year, Laura spoke of struggling to find a way to articulate her opinions, her experience, and her knowledge. . . . In linguistic terms, she noted that the first person singular (“I”) could be used in academic writing to express opinions if one was
60 also careful to use formal language:

*We can use the first person if someone **is asking** our response and interpretation of a specific discussion and be academic at the same time using very respectful formal language. (First Writing Task)*

But Laura also understood that the relationship between the personal and
65 the academic was as much about knowledge and meaning-making as about academic conventions . . .:

Sometimes we start writing in a very confusing and personal manner because we don’t know what to write about, and once we discover the path to follow and which way we should write, it makes it easier to write in a formal academic
70 *manner. (First Writing Task)*

Disciplinary knowledge was viewed by Laura as central to the process of becoming a clear and authoritative writer. She described how in first semester

she felt uncertain sometimes as to exactly what her thoughts were about the topics she **was studying** (Interview 2). By the end of the year, the process of
75 engaging with content from a range of sources **had enabled** her to develop her own opinions. She **was learning** to be, as she put it, “more myself”:

*I feel that I have much stronger views than before that relate to the subjects I **am studying** . . . I have my own opinion now. That **has changed** . . . I would like to impose myself more. (Interview 5) . . .*

80 She also revealed that if she wanted to obtain high grades, she would sometimes have to change her views and opinions when they conflicted with those of her tutors or lecturers—a recognition that academic success required her to negotiate heterogeneous disciplinary contexts with often highly asymmetrical power relations (cf. Canagarajah, 2002; Prior & Bilbro, 2012).



85 In her final interview, Laura **was still struggling** with the concept of authorship in academic writing:

I used to use more quotes than I use now . . . I use a lot more of my own words . . . I paraphrase

90 *more . . . sometimes you're more of an author . . . sometimes I see my text going exactly the way that I want with that idea [from a source text] . . . [but] I don't think I'm an author yet—I think it's a process. (Interview 5) . . .*

95 Fei's understanding of academic writing gradually moved from one of acquisition of “non-popular” vocabulary, grammar, and the mechanics of citation towards a more sophisticated view of writing as situated in the rhetoric of particular disciplines, with this shaping, for example, the relevance and appropriacy of types and locations of source materials. This shift, according
100 to Fei, was the result of increased discipline knowledge and her growing awareness of the wide range of people and resources (both formal and informal) that she could draw upon when needed. . . . For Laura, university writing was a very different sort of struggle. From the start of the year, Laura saw this primarily in terms of the search for an authentic and authoritative
105 academic identity in the disciplines she was engaged with. Her development in academic writing over the year was for her related to the interaction between increasing disciplinary knowledge, language, and identity.

References

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Excerpts from Morton, J., Storch, N., & Thompson, C. (2015). What our students tell us: Perceptions of three multilingual students on their academic writing in first year. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 30, 1–13.

TASK 2 DISCUSS

In groups of two or three, talk about the following question: What is good academic writing? In your discussion, refer to your own opinions, your experiences as a student, and the ideas in the article. Also, consider the quotation from Samuel Johnson at the beginning of the chapter, regarding the powers of an author.

VOCABULARY

FOUR STRATEGIES FOR VOCABULARY LEARNING

When you read academic articles, you will frequently come across words that you do not fully understand. The following are four strategies for dealing with such words; you will practise these strategies throughout this book.

Strategy 1: Pass over the Word or Phrase

If you feel that understanding the word is not necessary to understanding the general idea of the sentence, you may decide to pass over it and carry on reading.

Strategy 2: Look at the Structure of the Word

Sometimes you can guess meaning from the different parts that make up a word. For example, if you came across the phrase *deregulation of banking* and did not know what *deregulation* meant, you could find clues in the parts of the word:

- *de*—a prefix that can mean “to reverse or remove”
- *regulate*—a verb meaning “to set rules”
- *ation*—a suffix meaning “the process of doing something” and indicating that the word is a noun

From this analysis of the parts of the word, you can guess that the meaning might be “the process of removing rules or controls in banking.”

Strategy 3: Guess the Meaning from the Context

You can try to guess the meaning from the context by looking at the surrounding text for clues. For example, you may find a sentence such as “The researchers attempted replication of a previous experiment” in an academic article about a medical experiment. If you did not know the meaning of *replication*, you could search for clues in the surrounding text. If, further on in the text, you were to find

a phrase such as “after repeating the experiment with a different group to test the findings,” you could guess the meaning of *replication* without having to look it up in a dictionary.

Strategy 4: Look Up the Word in a Dictionary

In many cases, you will need to look up the meaning in a reliable dictionary. When you look up a word or phrase in a dictionary, you will often find more than one possible meaning. You then need to return to the text you are reading and decide which of the definitions best fits the context.

It can be difficult to understand vocabulary in academic journal articles and books. This is because authors use vocabulary in specialized ways in different fields. Even if you know what a word or phrase means in a general sense, an author may have a different, specialized meaning in mind.

When you do not understand a word or phrase, or a specific use of a word or phrase, you need to choose and apply one of the four strategies above.

TASK 3 PRACTISE THE FOUR STRATEGIES

Find the word or phrase in the first column of the table by referring to the line indicated in the Morton, Storch, and Thompson article. Read the whole sentence. If you think that the word is not important to the overall meaning, you can pass over it (1). If you feel that the word is important, use one of the other three strategies to try to define it: look at the structure of the word (2), guess the meaning from the context (3), or look up the word in a dictionary (4). Write a definition in the Meaning column and indicate the strategy, or strategies, that you used. Remember: authors use vocabulary for specific meanings in academic texts, so even if you think you know the general meaning of the word or phrase, make sure that you understand its specific meaning in the article.

Word/Phrase	Line	Meaning	Strategies Used			
			1	2	3	4
shifted	22	changed				
process	23	stages of doing something				
product	24	final thing produced, e.g., an essay				
cohesively	31	in a way that unites parts and forms a whole				
traced	32	discovered				
meta-awareness	33	consciousness of how you do things				
rhetorical differences	33	different strategies for persuasion				
articulate	57	explain clearly and coherently				
first person	58	I or we				
conventions	66	common ways of doing things				
disciplinary knowledge	71	knowledge in different subject areas				
viewed	71	seen or understood				

Word/Phrase	Line	Meaning	Strategies Used			
			1	2	3	4
authoritative writer	72	confident and trustworthy writer				
impose myself	79	demand attention from the reader				
negotiate	83	find one's way through or around				
cf.	84	compare with				
paraphrase	89	represent someone else's writing in your own words				
acquisition	95	learning				
mechanics of	96	how to do				
sophisticated	97	showing knowledge and experience				
draw upon	102	make use of				
primarily	104	mainly				
interaction between	106	how things influence each other				

*Words in bold type are Academic Word List (AWL) entries.

My eLab 

Practise Chapter 1
vocabulary online.

TASK 4 MAKE SENSE OF COMPLEX ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

The following are three examples of complex academic vocabulary from the Morton et al. article. As a reader, you need to understand the overall meaning of the sentence. Read each example, and choose which of the two explanations, written in less technical language, is correct.

1. . . . a recognition that academic success required her to negotiate heterogeneous disciplinary contexts with often highly asymmetrical power relations. [LINES 82–84]

Explanation 1: This means that she realized that if she wanted to do well at university, she would have to figure out how to write in different subject areas, from a position of much less power than the people teaching her.

Explanation 2: This means that she realized that if she wanted to do well at university, she had to meet and agree with her teachers, who were strict and powerful.

2. . . . a more sophisticated view of writing as situated in the rhetoric of particular disciplines, with this shaping, for example, the relevance and appropriacy of types and locations of source materials. [LINES 97–99]

Explanation 1: She is now a better writer and can persuade her readers in different subject areas. As a result, she can now also choose better evidence and information from books and articles.

Explanation 2: She now has a more complex understanding of writing, accepting that it reflects how people persuade each other in different ways in different subject areas. These strategies affect how students find and use relevant and appropriate evidence and information in books and articles.

3. Laura saw this primarily in terms of the search for an authentic and authoritative academic identity in the disciplines she was engaged with. [LINES 103–105]

Explanation 1: Laura’s main struggle was finding a real and confident sense of who she was as a writer in the different subjects she was studying.

Explanation 2: Laura had to look for examples of university writing that focused on reality, confidence, and identity in the different subjects she was studying.

VOCABULARY



FORMALITY: PHRASAL VERBS AND LATINATE VERBS

This book is written in Standard Modern English, a language that did not exist a thousand years ago. To understand formality in academic writing, it is useful to trace the origins of the English language. After the French Norman invasion of Britain in 1066, French was established as the high-status language of the elite in Britain, while Anglo-Saxon, a Germanic dialect, remained the lower-status, everyday language of many people. Over the next three hundred years, the two languages merged into Old English, which later became Modern English. The result of this history is that there are often two ways to say things in English, one with its origins in Anglo-Saxon and the other with its origins in Latin, which came to English via French.

Consider the following sentences:

1. I **looked into** the room to see if anyone had arrived early. (verb + preposition)
2. I **looked into** the possibility of moving closer to college. (phrasal verb)
3. I **investigated** the possibility of moving closer to college. (Latinate verb)

The words in bold in example 1 are a verb and a preposition. The preposition indicates the direction in which the speaker looked (i.e., into the room); it does not change the meaning of the verb.

Example 2 contains a phrasal verb, formed by combining a verb (*look*) with a particle (*into*). The particle in phrasal verbs changes the meaning of the verb—in this case, from “look + into” to “investigate.”

In example 3, the verb *investigate* is a Latinate verb. Latinate verbs tend to be longer than the verb components of phrasal verbs.

In academic writing, Latinate verbs are usually seen to be more formal than phrasal verbs, and many writers prefer to use them. In everyday speech and in less formal writing genres, phrasal verbs are more commonly used. English is rich in phrasal verbs; many have an equivalent, more formal alternative, often with its origins in Latin.

If you use too many Latinate verbs in your academic writing, it may seem overly formal. Equally, if you use too many phrasal verbs, your writing may seem overly informal or conversational. You need to strike a balance that makes your writing readable yet authoritative.

TASK 5 FIND THE LESS FORMAL VERBS

In Fei's interview and writing excerpts quoted in the Morton et al. article, she uses some less formal phrasal verbs and verb–preposition combinations. Match the following formal words and phrases to the less formal ones used by Fei.

1. searching in a book [LINE 20]: looking up
2. acquiring [LINE 25]: picking up
3. analyzing [LINE 25]: looking at
4. discuss [LINE 39]: talk about

TASK 6 FIND THE MORE FORMAL VERBS

The Morton et al. article contains many examples of formal academic vocabulary in the authors' writing as well as in Fei's and Laura's interviews and writing excerpts. Match the following less formal phrasal verbs to the more formal verbs used in the article.

1. bring into (my writing) [LINE 31]: incorporate
2. put together [LINE 37]: organise
3. build up [LINE 55]: construct
4. get across [LINE 57]: articulate
5. find out [LINE 68]: discover
6. put together [LINE 75]: develop
7. went against [LINE 81]: conflicted with

TASK 7 REWRITE FORMAL AND LESS FORMAL SENTENCES

1. Increase the formality of the following sentences by replacing the phrasal verbs.

a) I **tried out** the theory in my lab experiment.

I **tested** the theory in my lab experiment.

b) I had to **make sure** that all of the equipment was working.

I had to **verify/ascertain** that all of the equipment was working.

c) I **got over** failing and passed the second time around.

I **recovered from** failing and passed the second time around.

2. Reduce the formality of the following sentences by using phrasal verbs.

Remind students that many phrasal verbs, such as *carry out*, are commonly used in academic writing. Students need to find a balance between phrasal verbs and Latinate verbs.

- a) The medical students **performed** the procedure under supervision.

The medical students **carried out** the procedure under supervision.

- b) I wasn't sure what my instructor **was implying** in his feedback.

I wasn't sure what my instructor **was getting at** in his feedback.

- c) I **admire** my sister, who graduated within three years.

I **look up to** my sister, who graduated within three years.

EFFECTIVE SENTENCE STRUCTURE

TENSE AND ASPECT

Tense

We use different verb tenses to situate actions and states at certain times in the past, present, and future. In the following examples, the time idea is underlined and the verb, in bold.

The assessed essay **is** due now. (present simple tense for present time)

At the time of the study, Fei **was** 20 years old and Laura, 25. (past simple tense for past time)

Both students **will graduate** next year. (future time)

Aspect

Aspect is slightly different. It refers to how an action or state relates to different time ideas rather than when it is situated in time. There are two kinds of aspect: perfect and continuous. Perfect aspect indicates a relationship between two time periods (for example, past and present, past and past, present and future, or future and future), while continuous aspect indicates that an action is, was, or will be in progress at a certain time.

Perfect Aspect

I feel that I have much stronger views than before that relate to the subjects I am studying . . . I have my own opinion now. That **has changed** . . . I would like to impose myself more.

In the example above, the present perfect tense is used by Laura to explain a relationship between the past and the present. When Laura states "That has changed," the past-time idea is indefinite (in other words, we do not know when the change took place). In this use of the present perfect tense, it is not important