

## Fundamentals of Academic Writing: A Literature Review

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### Abstract

In order to write for academic purposes, all novice ESL and EFL writers must be well-informed about the fundamentals of academic writing (AW) in English. Developing academic writing skills for all students is crucial because they must produce good writing skills to meet the standards of college and university course writing assignments. The typical college and university writing assignments include descriptive writing, analytical writing, persuasive writing, critical writing, and inquiry writing. In the meantime, it is also crucial for them to understand that writing is a recursive process involving various stages, such as generating ideas, outlining, planning, drafting, revising, editing, and sharing. During the writing process, the writers should not only consider the elements of AW, comprising content, organization, purpose and audience, critical thinking, word choice, grammar, and mechanics, but also its basic conventions, including objectivity, formality or style, citation style, simplicity, clarity and conciseness, and genre awareness. Against this background, the primary purpose of this paper is to review the fundamentals of academic writing. The paper first defines AW as an art, science, and craft. It then briefly discusses the main types of writing students must produce as a part of their college and university course assignments. Finally, the paper highlights some key features of research-based writing tasks generally assigned to graduate students, such as reading responses or reaction papers, reflection papers, research papers, and theses and dissertations.

**Keywords:** *Fundamentals of academic writing, writing process, elements of writing, conventions of academic writing, genre awareness, citation style, research-based writing*

### Introduction

#### *Defining Academic Writing*

Academic writing (AW) refers to the writing used in the college and university-level writing courses (Johnson, 2016). Therefore, AW has become the primary communication medium between scholars in academic subjects and disciplines in higher education (Greene & Lidinsky, 2015). AW uses standard written English that is simple, clear, focused, and formal. It is also technical, objective, impersonal, concise, logical, and

well-organized. An academic writer must meet genre-specific expectations and stylistic conventions (Ferris, 2018; Giltrow et al., 2014; Osmond, 2016; Starkey, 2015). AW is specific to context, task, purpose, and audience (Ferris, 2018; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Starkey, 2015). In parallel with these ideas, Gottlieb and Ernst-Slavit (2013) stated that “[t]he distinct purpose, audience, and context of communication result in clear differences in terms of language use in the selection of words, formality, sentence construction, and discourse patterns” (p. 2).

AW is seen differently by scholars based on its features. For example, Osmond (2016) argued that AW projects writers’ in-depth knowledge, critical thinking skills, and analytical skills while studying different academic subjects within their disciplines and majors. It is also seen as an inquiry because writers can discover their values, beliefs, strengths, and areas to improve in writing (Starkey, 2015). Grabe and Kaplan (1996) recommended that each writer understand AW through the lens of an ethnographic approach. Before creating any written text, they must ask this fundamental question: who writes what to whom, for what purpose, why, when, where, and how? (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). Echoing similar ideas, Ferris (2018) has summarized the features of successful academic writers and standards of writing used in academic and professional contexts as,

*[s] Successful writing in academic and professional settings requires a complex range of skills and knowledge bases. Writers must have at least an adequate grasp of the content about what they are writing. They must understand the rhetorical situation, including the purpose of the writing and the knowledge and expectations of their audience of readers. ... writers need advanced control of the linguistic features (vocabulary, spelling, grammar, cohesive ties) and extra-linguistic features (punctuation, capitalization, formatting) appropriate for the content, genre, and target audience for their text. (p. 75)*

Johnson (2016) added that AW has three main characteristics. AW “is an art, a science, and a craft” (Johnson, 2016, p. xi).

### ***Academic Writing as an Art***

AW is an art because the writer expresses their ideas and thoughts, which are not identical. No specific method or technique works best for all academic writers because their writing skills differ (Johnson, 2016; Singh & Lukkarilla, 2017). Therefore, each academic writer discovers the unique strategies and techniques that best work to develop their AW to convey their ideas, thoughts, and messages to their intended audience.

### ***Academic Writing as a Science***

Johnson (2016) and Lester and Lester (2012) argued that AW is viewed as a science because the writer uses a particular style to cite sources and format academic texts. Different academic disciplines and programs use different citation styles and formats

in higher education. American Psychological Association (APA) and Modern Language Association (MLA) are predominantly used citation styles in the world's higher education contexts. For example, the APA style is used in social sciences, but the MLA style is used in literature, arts, and humanities. Likewise, the American Medical Association (AMA) is used in medicine, health, and other biological sciences. Chicago and the American Sociological Association (ASA) styles are used in sociology, geography, and history (Johnson, 2016).

### *Academic Writing as a Craft*

Johnson (2016) argued that AW is understood as a craft. By craft, he means it is a skill or set of skills that enable the writer to write texts appropriate for academic contexts. So, academic writer is continually developing skills throughout their academic life, as it is challenging to master with limited exposure. Instead, the writer enhances their writing skills through constant practice, critical thinking, seeking feedback, and revising it multiple times.

In the present context, AW is understood in a broader sense than in the past. It is a social practice guided by various social and cultural values of academic institutions. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) argued that AW "should be seen as a set of practices that are socially contextualized ... academic writing is simply one valued set of practices appropriate to the context rather than a single set of cognitive skills" (p. 17). In the higher education context, AW has become "a peer-to-peer communication about knowledge and inquiry within research communities.... [It is] a scholarly writing, the research genres and writing in the disciplines" (Giltrow et al., 2014, p. 313). Additionally, AW is a medium of communication among the members of a discourse community. It is a group of recognizable people who share the same social values, beliefs, specialized knowledge about the world, and the ways they use language (Giltrow et al., 2014).

### **Types of Academic Writing**

University and college students must produce different types of AW. According to Bailey (2015), AW's most common types include notation, letter, resume, summary, annotated bibliography, paragraph, report, essay, research paper, and thesis or dissertation. Each type of AW has a specific purpose, style, and length, as decided by the academic program and disciplines. Different schools and departments require students to follow different formats and citation styles in their academic papers.

Different types of academic writing are combined to write a single academic paper. For instance, the writer uses different genres while writing a research paper. For example, while writing a literature review, critical writing is used. Descriptive writing is used to write the methodology section of the research paper. Descriptive and analytical writing styles are used to write the results and discussion sections. Also, the writer needs to interpret the research study's results (Johnson, 2016). Therefore, based on language features and purposes, four types of AW are used in the higher education context.

## *Descriptive or Expository Writing*

Descriptive writing is the most basic type of AW. Its primary purpose is to describe, explain, and deliver information on a particular topic or issue (Johnson, 2016). According to Kirszner and Mandell (2015), in descriptive writing, the authors use words to paint a picture for their readers, using “language that creates a vivid impression of what has been seen, heard, smelled, tasted, or touched” (p. 70). They further state that the more details the writers can include, the better the descriptive writing will be.

## *Analytical Writing*

Most academic writing in higher education contexts is analytical. Analytical writing is used to show relationships among pieces of information. Specifically, analytical writing is used to compare and contrast and critically evaluate different theories, models, approaches, methods, and results of empirical studies (University of Sydney, 2019). Lerych and Criswell (2016) argued that analytical writing follows “a cycle of development: a five-part process that includes a claim, context, evidence, analysis, and synthesis. When these elements are presented logically, with enough specific detail, the result is a unified, developed, organized, and coherent [writing]” (pp. 120-121).

## *Persuasive Writing*

The purpose of persuasive writing goes deeper than that of analytical writing. In persuasive writing, the writer makes a coherent argument or addresses at least one point of view on a topic or issue, followed by supported by details (University of Sydney, 2019). The supporting details can include reasons, explanations, examples, experiences, observations, and credible research results. Johnson (2016) argued that “the purpose of persuasive writing is to make a case for or against an issue using concise, objective language, and sound reasoning” (p. 4). Kirszner and Mandell (2015) argued that in persuasive writing, the writers try to convince readers to act or think in a certain way. Such type of writing is used in research proposals, argumentative papers, and research papers.

## *Critical Writing*

The writer must consider at least two points of view, including their views, in a critical writing task (University of Sydney, 2019). Specifically, the writer explains an author’s interpretation or argument in a research article, evaluates their argument’s strength, and gives their interpretations in this type of writing. Writing a critical review of a journal article or writing about the credibility of research results can be an excellent example of critical writing. The writer also presents their agreements or disagreements with the author’s views (University of Sydney, 2019). Critical writing consists of three steps. First, the writer summarizes the whole or part of the research article. Next,

the writer offers their opinion on the author's argument presented in the article by highlighting both strengths and weaknesses. Finally, the writer presents their point of view supported by relevant supporting details (University of Sydney, 2019).

### *Inquiry Writing*

As inquiry writing is research-based writing, it is also called research writing. According to Johnson (2016), the primary purpose of this type of writing is "to describe all phases of the inquiry process" (p. 4). In this type of writing, the writer answers a question or responds to a common issue by gathering data from primary sources such as observations, interviews, surveys, and secondary sources such as peer-reviewed research articles, educational websites, and seminal books (Lerych & Criswell, 2016; Johnson, 2016). Lerych and Criswell (2016) argued that this type of writing has seven essential steps in the research process. They include posing a solid research question, finding sources, limiting research results, evaluating, and selecting the most credible and suitable sources, taking good notes, and integrating sources into writing.

### **Academic Writing Process**

AW is not a task that the writer can complete in a single sitting; instead, it is a process that takes many sittings. Johnson (2016) and Zamel (1983) stated that AW's process involves thinking, generating ideas, note-taking, outlining, planning, drafting, revising, rewriting, proofreading, and editing. In this process, academic writers must focus on what they are communicating, how they communicate, and with whom. Johnson (2016) argued that the AW process involves the following six steps:

#### *Research to Collect Data or Information Gathering*

One can only write if they have something to write about. So, at this step, the writer finds credible sources, critically reads them, and takes notes. This stage is also called information gathering or consulting resources to generate ideas. The writer mainly gathers ideas by repossessing information from their long-term memory or reading online or printed sources or materials (White & Arndt, 1991). Additionally, if the writer plans to write a research-based article, data can be collected using various tools such as surveys, observations, interviews, and document reviews (Johnson, 2016).

#### *Predrafting*

This stage takes place before writing the first draft. It also involves planning, outlining, and generating ideas. Bailey (2015) argued that careful outlining helps the writer to make their writing easy later. Johnson (2016) added that reading extensively and note-taking sensibly is vital at this phase. He added that the ideas could be gathered using different techniques, such as brainstorming and semantic maps.

## *Writing the First Draft*

At this stage, the ideas generated at the earlier stage are jotted down on the pages. Starkey (2015) claimed that writing the first draft is the most challenging phase for most writers because it requires filling blank pages with words. Johnson (2016) recommended that writers “strive for quantity versus quality at this stage” because once they have written the draft, it can be refined through multiple revisions. White and Arndt (1991) emphasized that every writer must revise and rewrite the first draft.

## *Revising*

Revising is a crucial step in the AW process because writing is all about revising. A good writer is a rewriter (White & Arndt, 1991). Likewise, Starkey (2015) believed that revising is “re-seeing” (p. 153), including rearranging the ideas, replacing them, and addressing the significant issues of the paper. Bailey (2018) recommended leaving the first draft for a day or so and rereading it critically to ensure the paper answers the questions in the title. Johnson (2016) suggested that the writer revise their writing at least four times by focusing on higher-order concerns (HOCs) such as content, organization, word choice, and meaning. They need not worry about lower-order concerns (LOCs) such as grammatical, spelling, and punctuation issues at this phase. So, the writer “writes, rereads, reshapes, addresses feedback, and revises the draft many times” (Starkey, 2015, p. 5). At this phase, the writer must share their writing with peers or reviewers to seek feedback.

## *Editing*

After the draft is revised multiple times, proofreading and editing should be done to avoid any remaining HOCs, such as issues with the thesis, audience, purpose, organization, and development, as well as to address any LOCs, such as sentence structure, grammar, spelling, and punctuation issues (Bailey, 2018; Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2020). Proofreading is checking one’s writing for minor errors. Editing is broader than proofreading because editing involves checking for grammatical, punctuation, and spelling issues and adding and deleting ideas. Also, editing means checking the organization or structure of the paper on a macro level (i.e., checking the organization of the entire paper) and Meso-level (i.e., checking the organization of only a single paragraph of a paper) (Johnson, 2016; Singh & Lukkarila, 2017; White & Arndt, 1991).

Starkey (2015) and Johnson (2016) added that the issues of grammar and style are addressed at this phase and also recommended using the updated version of word processor programs, citation machines, and grammar checks, such as Grammarly, for checking grammar, word choice, style, and citations.



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## Sharing and Publishing

Sharing and publishing is the final step in the writing process. At this stage, the paper's final draft is submitted to the professor if it is a part of an assignment in a particular course. However, if it is written for publication, it is sent to a journal published in the field (Johnson, 2016; Hyland, 2003).

## Elements of Academic Writing

There are many elements to be considered in good academic writing. The main elements of academic writing are briefly discussed below.

### *Content (Generating Ideas)*

Hirvela (2016) highlighted the significance of connecting reading and writing in the second language teaching and learning process and argued that reading supports writing and vice versa. So, reading multiple sources around the research area helps the writer to generate ideas about the topic. One technique to generate ideas is brainstorming, in which the writer haphazardly jots down all the ideas that come to their mind about the topic (Bailey, 2015; Write & Arndt, 1991). The second technique to generate ideas is by using mind maps. The final technique to gather ideas is selecting credible resources, reading them critically, and taking notes of the critical points (Johnson, 2016; Write & Arndt, 1991) because AW "includes only academically credible information that is relevant to supporting and forwarding the writer's argument" (Singh & Lukkarila, 2017, p. 6). Highlighting the ESL teachers' role, especially in the higher education context, Hyland (2003) mentioned that they "need to help learners to acquire appropriate cognitive schema or knowledge of topics and vocabulary they will need to create an effective text" (p. 15).

### **Organization and Flow of Ideas**

Organization refers to the logical presentation of ideas and information in a "structured format appropriate for a particular type of text" (Swales & Feak, 2012, p. 8). In other words, the organization is also a presentation of ideas coherently and cohesively. The academic writer must follow specific patterns of organization to meet the readers' expectations. Also, there should be a sentence-to-sentence connection in each paragraph of the paper to maintain its flow. Kirsznner and Mandell (2015) stressed that "each body paragraph should be unified, coherent, and well developed" (p. 55). White and Arndt (1991) maintained that structuring information involves several organizational processes of grouping ideas together and deciding how to sequence them to communicate the writer's central message effectively. Based on its organization, the introductory five-paragraph essay is divided into three main parts, each with a unique organization.

## *Introduction*

The introduction section of an essay introduces the topic and states the purpose and scope (Bailey, 2015; Johnson, 2016). Starkey (2015) argued that the introductory paragraph should include three things. They are hook or attention-getter (for example, a thought-provoking question, anecdote, statistics, or famous quotation), a little background information or overview of the topic, and a thesis statement at the end. Starkey (2015) suggested that a good thesis statement should answer a question, which can be stated or implied in the writing prompt. The thesis statement also “provides unity and sense of direction” (Jester & Jester, 2010, p. 168) to the paper. A thesis statement embodies all the main points presented in different paragraphs of the paper. More specifically, a good thesis statement has an exact topic, the writer’s opinion, and three to five reasons or points to support their opinions. These reasons or points function as topic sentences of the paper’s body paragraphs (Starkey, 2015). Hence, the topic sentences of all the body paragraphs should be in line with the thesis statement. Unlike in an introductory five-paragraph essay, the introduction section’s format differs in the case of research papers and theses or dissertations. In the introduction section, the writer introduces the topic, problematizes the research issue or problem, establishes the significance, creates the research gap, and states its purpose and research questions or hypotheses (Lewin, 2010).

## *Body Paragraphs*

After completing the introduction section, the academic paper is further structured into body paragraphs. Body paragraphs are between the introduction and conclusion (Cozby & Bates, 2018; Starkey, 2015). The body paragraphs are organized by seriation, headings, and sub-headings (Johnson, 2016). The number of body paragraphs depends on the nature of the topic and the writer’s points to support their argument. As far as possible, the body paragraphs should be concise. However, a one-sentence paragraph should be avoided. Starkey (2015) suggested that body paragraphs should have at least four components. First, every paragraph should have a topic sentence congruent with the introductory paragraph’s thesis statement. Second, the topic sentence should be further supported by evidence, i.e., supporting details such as reasons, explanations, examples, experiences, statistics, and in-text citations. Third, body paragraphs should have the writer’s analysis and commentary demonstrating why the evidence supports their topic sentence. Finally, they should also have a concluding sentence(s) that restate the concerned paragraph’s topic sentence.

## **Conclusion**

Conclusions can vary depending on the type and purpose of the paper. According to Bailey (2018), the conclusion provides a clear answer to any question about the topic and summarizes the key points discussed in the paper. In other words, the conclusion restates the thesis statement and summarizes the main ideas discussed in the paper



(Johnson, 2016). The conclusion section ends with the writer's closing note, including a clincher, a persuasive quotation from an expert, an excellent call to action, a striking statistic related to the topic, and a prediction (Kirszner & Mandell, 2015; Starkey, 2015). In the case of the research paper, the writer sums up the main results. The writer then identifies the study's limitations and implications and recommends future research areas (Kirszner & Mandell, 2015).

## Unity, Coherence, and Cohesion

A paragraph is a group of sentences that deal with a single topic (Bailey, 2015). If a paragraph deals with only one topic or idea, it is considered rich in unity. In other words, the writer maintains unity by dealing with only one idea in a paragraph. So, juxtaposing different ideas into a single paragraph violates the principle of unity. It also does not help the writer stay focused on the same idea. Singh and Lukkarila (2017) argued that AW is organized as per the logical principles of argumentation. The first sentence of the paragraph introduces the topic. Apart from unity, coherence and cohesion play a crucial role in maintaining the overall organization of AW. In line with these ideas, Min (n.d.) highlighted the importance of coherence and cohesion in AW as,

*Coherence means connecting ideas at the idea level, and cohesion means connecting ideas at the sentence level. Coherence refers to the writing's rhetorical aspects, including developing and supporting arguments (e.g., thesis statement development), synthesizing and integrating readings, organizing, and clarifying ideas. The cohesion of writing focuses on the grammatical aspects of writing. Cohesive writing refers to the connection of ideas both at the sentence and paragraph levels. (n.p.)*

Overall, AW should follow a specific organizational structure both on a macro level (i.e., across the entire academic paper) and meso-level (i.e., within a single paragraph of an academic paper). The writer maintains cohesion in AW by using different types of linguistic devices such as reference words and conjunctions (Bailey, 2015), transition words and expressions (Singh & Lukkarila (2017), and hedging devices within and across paragraphs(s) (Lewin, 2010).

## Purpose and Audience

Before writing anything, the writer should be clear about the purpose of writing. Kirszner and Mandell (2015) argued that the purpose limits the writer to what to say and how to say it. According to Bailey (2015), there are three main reasons for writing: (1) to argue on a subject of common interest and give the writer's view, (2) to report on a piece of research study and create some new knowledge, and (3) to synthesize research conducted by others on a topic. Therefore, AW is unique because the writer shares inquiry-based knowledge to inform a particular academic community (Singh & Lukkarila, 2017).

Before the author writes any text, they need to consider their audience because they will determine their writing (Swales & Feak, 2012). Likewise, Kirszner and Mandell (2015) argued that while writing any text, the audience should be kept in mind because they determine the paper's purpose. While writing, academic writers envision a specific audience who share knowledge regarding a topic or issue they are writing about (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Singh & Lukkarila, 2017). By highlighting the role of the audience, Grabe and Kaplan (1996) added that the audience is always at the center when creating a text because they play an essential role in the writing's meaning-making. For example, writing a thesis or dissertation fulfills a graduate degree requirement. Although it is primarily written for thesis or dissertation committee members, the thesis or dissertation writers keep the entire academic discourse community in mind.

Audience and purpose are typically interrelated because the purpose is often educational if the audience knows less than the writer on a particular topic. However, if the audience knows more than the writer, the writer's purpose is to share an understanding and knowledge with the audience (Swales & Feak, 2012).

## **Critical Thinking**

Critical thinking is considered a fifth skill in the present context; the other four skills are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Osmond (2016) argued that critical thinking is a way of thinking about the writer's sources to write or present their argument in their papers. Bailey (2015) stated that although the academic text is source-based, it is vital for the writers to adopt a critical attitude. Critical thinking means not accepting or taking things for granted but questioning and assessing the source from a critical lens. Bailey (2018) argued that ESL and EFL writers require the development of close and critical reading skills that will enable them to read different academic texts in a formal style. They must learn to scan, skim, and survey the information in academic texts. Training them with study skills to read academic texts, including journal articles, is crucial.

## **Word Choice, Grammar, and Mechanics**

The knowledge of basic grammatical concepts, academic vocabulary, and mechanics helps the writer correct their AW (Osmond, 2016). Bailey (2018) stressed that academic vocabulary items are essential as they embody meaning in AW. So, the writers should be careful in choosing appropriate academic vocabulary items specific to a particular genre. Using informal words and uncommon abbreviations in AW should be avoided. Jonson (2016) stressed that the academic writer should be familiar with basic grammatical rules because grammar knowledge supports and maintains accuracy in writing. Different word processor programs and software can be used for checking grammar in AW. Equally, AW should be free from punctuation and spelling issues because punctuating the text helps the readers understand what the writer means (Bailey, 2015).

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## Basic Conventions of Academic Writing

Johnson (2016) argued that AW is “formal, precise, purposeful, and objective” (p. 35). Furthermore, Johnson (2016) stated that AW should follow additional basic rules that include (1) using Times or Times New Roman 12-point font, (2) leaving a one-inch margin on the top, bottom, and sides, (3) double spacing between lines and paragraphs, (4) aligning paper flush left only, and (5) indenting all paragraphs except abstract in a research paper. In addition to these formatting conventions, AW should follow the following basic conventions.

### *Objectivity*

AW should not be subjective. Instead, it should be objective, impersonal, and formal because objective writing is more convincing than subjective (Bailey, 2018; Johnson, 2016; Osmond, 2016). According to Osmond (2016), establishing objectivity in AW is maintaining a thoughtful gap between the writers and the topic they are writing about. To be objective, AW should be guided by research data and existing literature or reading, not by the writer’s prior experiences and knowledge. Osmond (2016) argued that objectivity could be achieved in four ways. First, it can be achieved by avoiding first and second-person pronouns. Instead, using third-person pronouns helps the writer to maintain objectivity. The second way to achieve objectivity is by concluding the research paper based on how the research has led the writer, not their personal opinions and thoughts. Third, objectivity can be maintained by avoiding colloquial language and contractions. Finally, it can also be achieved by referencing other authors’ or researchers’ works to show the writer’s involvement with academic discussion on a topic or issue.

### *Using Formal Language or Style*

AW is formal in the sense that informal or colloquial language is avoided in it. AW should be formal regarding the “message being conveyed and the audience” (Swales & Feak, 2012, p. 14). Using formal language also helps the author to establish objectivity (Bailey, 2018; Osmond, 2016). AW can be formal by using academic language (not colloquial), academic vocabulary, and abbreviations of some specific words and phrases. It can also be formal by avoiding first and second-person pronouns and contractions (e.g., did not instead of didn’t) (Osmond, 2016). Instead of using first and second-person pronouns, it is better to use third-person pronouns such as he, she, the writer, and the author.

### *Simplicity, Clarity, and Conciseness*

AW should be simple (direct), precise (accurate), clear (using only the necessary words to make it easy to understand), and concise (using as few words as possible to make the point briefly) (Johnson, 2016; Osmond, 2016). Lewin (2010) suggested that clarity of

writing can be enhanced by avoiding the use of heavy sentences, ambiguity, punctuating the text meticulously, using ellipsis for missing information (which is signaled by three dots, but if the ellipsis is at the end of the sentence, it is signaled by four dots), and using dashes and parentheses. Starkey (2015) noted that the writer “can modify a quotation by adding one or two words in [square] brackets to indicate that [the writer has] made a slight change for clarity’s sake” (p. 125). Lewin (2010) and Bailey (2018) stated that AW’s conciseness is maintained by avoiding repetition and redundancy, avoiding jargon, replacing long phrases with shorter words or connectives, and changing compound sentences into complex ones changing into passive voice and using compression.

### *Avoiding Biased Language*

AW should not use discriminatory language based on geographical region, exceptionality, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, culture, power, or religion (Johnson, 2016). Similarly, Starkey (2015) suggested that good AW should be neutral because it should not offend any potential readers. Discriminatory language is avoided by using more neutral language than biased one, especially for gender (not always male and female), pronouns (not always he), and vocabulary items (not always chairman and humankind).

### *Using Abbreviations*

Abbreviations are “words grouped together, then referred to by their first letters” (Osmond, 2016, p. 11). There is a specific way to use abbreviations in AW. When the writers do that, they spell the words first and mention their corresponding abbreviations in parentheses next (Osmond, 2016). For example, nonnative English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), teaching English as a second language (TESL) and teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). However, many abbreviations are generally not written in full because they are familiar to the academic discourse community. Some examples of such abbreviations include AIDS, DNA, and UNO.

### *Genre Awareness*

According to Hyland (2003), the genre is a socially organized way of using language for a particular purpose. Similarly, Martin (1992) defined the genre as a goal-oriented stage social process because members of a culture interact to achieve them. For Starkey (2015), the genre is a type, or a category of writing used in a specific field. For example, an argumentative essay differs from a cover letter. These two writing types differ in structure, style, purpose, context, and audience. Hyland (2003) states that writers are required “to follow certain social conventions for organizing messages” (p.18) in their writings with a fixed purpose. Tardy (2016) suggested that academic writers should have genre awareness because genre conventions have “characterize[d] academic and professional communication [and] research” (p. 5). Johns (2002) stated that academic writers should know different genres because they often combine genres in the same

writing task. Starkey (2015) states that the most frequently used genres are “analyzing a text, arguing for a position, proposing a solution, and making an evaluation” (p. 191). In these types of texts, the academic writer should meet distinct patterns and techniques per their audience’s expectations (Starkey, 2015). Lewin (2010) added that AW requires the writer to meet genre conventions and social realities because the audience may forgive the writer for making a grammatical error but not for violating a social norm. So, AW is required to be grammatically correct and socially appropriate.

## *Plagiarism*

Plagiarism is an unethical work in which the writer claims someone’s work or ideas as their own by not giving credit to them. It is perceived as academic theft or crime (Bailey, 2018; Jester & Jester, 2012; Johnson, 2016; Swales & Feak, 2012; Starkey, 2015). According to APA (2019), “[p]lagiarism is the act of presenting the words, ideas, or images of another as one’s own; it denies the author’s credit where credit is due. Whether deliberate or unintentional, plagiarism violates ethical standards in scholarship” (n. p.). Common examples of plagiarism include cutting and pasting, not citing sources, and buying a paper from online sources. In an academic discourse community, the writer must acknowledge the sources used in their writing to give credit to the author and maintain academic integrity.

There are two ways to avoid plagiarism: in-text citations and referencing (APA, 2020). In-text citing sources means mentioning authors in the text where the writers have borrowed ideas from other authors. This helps the writers give credit to the authors and add credibility to their writing (Bailey, 2018; Johnson, 2016). According to APA (2020), three ways to in-text cite sources include direct quotes, long quotes, and paraphrasing. First, a direct quote is “bringing the original words [39 words in APA style and four printed lines in MLA style] of the author into writer’s work” (Bailey, 2015, p. 55) by placing quotation marks around the quote and indicating its source in parenthesis (Starkey, 2015). Next, the writers use long quotations that are longer than 39 words or four printed lines to support their arguments (APA, 2019; MLA, 2016). The final way to in-text cite sources is referencing, in which the writer restates only the source text’s relevant information in different words and structures without changing its meaning (Bailey, 2015; Starkey, 2015). One important point to note while paraphrasing is that the paraphrased text may be longer or shorter than the source text, but it must maintain the author’s same intended meaning as expressed in the source text (APA, 2019; Bailey, 2015).

The second way to avoid plagiarism is by listing all sources in-texted in the alphabetical order of the authors’ last names or the first significant word of the source if there is no author (APA, 2019; Bailey, 2018; MLA, 2016; Starkey, 2015). The reference list appears on a separate page. Like in-text citations, referencing sources is very important in all academic papers because it helps guide the audience to refer to the sources if they desire to explore the topic further. Next, it helps the writers to demonstrate that they have read

the leading authorities on the subject or research area, which ultimately adds academic rigor to their writing (Bailey, 2018; Osmond, 2016; Starkey, 2015).

## **Research-Based Report Writing**

### *Identifying and Utilizing Sources*

For research-based writing, Bailey (2018) stated that it is vital for the writer to identify and understand the most relevant and appropriate sources to write a good paper. The writer should be trained to examine the most appropriate and credible resources, explore multiple ways of locating resources, and explain the use of electronic resources. In line with these ideas, Starkey (2015) suggested that “the CARS Checklist” (p. 84) should be used for evaluating online sources. The CARS Checklist stands for credibility, accuracy, reasonableness, and support. In other words, the writer must ensure that the resource is primarily credible, updated, evidence-based, fair, consistent, and supported by other sources (Starkey, 2015). Some credible sources that the writers can utilize for their research include textbooks, reference books, peer-reviewed articles, government reports, websites, newspapers and magazines, popular periodicals, conference proceedings, and e-books.

### *Note-Taking, Outlining, and Summarizing*

Note-taking is jotting down the most critical points from the source (written or spoken) text. Nevertheless, summarizing is the condensed form of the source text, including its main points. So, both notetaking and summarizing contain the source text’s main information in two different forms, in the form of points in notetaking and in the form of a concise text in summarizing (Bailey, 2015, 2018; Starkey, 2015). Notes do not have a specific style, as they are taken for personal use. They will support the writer by outlining, including main points, sub-points, and sub-sub-points. Also, outlining helps the writer summarize (Bailey, 2018). College and university students should develop notetaking, outlining, and summarizing skills because they are an indispensable part of preparing for tests, class discussions, research papers, and theses or dissertations (Cozy & Bates, 2018; Starkey, 2015; Swales & Feak, 2012).

### *Reading Responses or Reaction Papers*

The writer should have practical reading skills to write good reading responses (Starkey, 2015). In higher education contexts, students are required to write many essays or papers responding to different types of written texts. Swales and Feak (2012) argued that in reading response or reaction papers, students are expected “to draw on their own experiences, feelings, and ideas as well as to make methodological and analytic comments about a talk or a written text” (p. 270). According to Swales and Feak (2012), students answer these questions when they write reading responses or reaction papers:



*what was the text or talk about? Who wrote the text or gave the talk?, what was the main message of the text or talk?, how do you feel about what you read or heard?, what impressions did the text or talk have on you?, why do you agree or disagree with?, how does what you read or heard relate to the course in which the reaction paper was assigned?, can you identify with or do you see yourself in what you read or heard? (p. 270)*

These types of assignments are challenging for ESL and EFL students. However, they benefit them because the students participating in these assignments integrate observations and experiences that reflect their social, cultural, and educational backgrounds. Reading responses can also be an eye-opener to the instructors as they contain students' new thoughts and ideas on reading or lectures (Swales & Feak, 2012).

### ***Thesis or Dissertation***

A thesis or dissertation is prepared based on the findings of an original research study. In most of the world's graduate programs, students must " plan, conduct, write, and defend an original research study" (Roberts, 2010, p. 2). Additionally, Willis et al. (2010) argued that thesis or dissertation writing is a significant task in graduate programs. The thesis or dissertation's length can be from 100 to 300 pages depending on the program's nature, academic level, and types of the research methodology employed to conduct the research study. A traditional five-chapter thesis or dissertation typically contains Introduction, Literature Review, Research Design or Methodology, Results or Findings, and Discussions, Conclusions, and Implications (Willis et al., 2010) explicitly.

### ***Similarities between Thesis and Dissertation***

There are two main similarities between a thesis and a dissertation. First, the thesis and dissertation are research reports prepared as partial fulfillment of graduate programs (Joyner et al., 2014). Second, they reflect the researchers' capabilities to conduct research studies that make new contributions to theory or practice (Roberts, 2010).

### ***Differences between Thesis and Dissertation***

A thesis differs from a dissertation based on educational level, specialty area, and audience. First, in the US university context, master's students write a thesis, while doctoral students write dissertations because doctoral students are required to go into greater depth and detail than those master's students (Bui, 2009; Joyner et al., 2014; Paltridge & Starfield, 2020). Therefore, a doctoral dissertation is more rigorous than a master's thesis (Joyner et al., 2014). Second, a dissertation is longer than a thesis in terms of its volume and the gravity of data collection, which depends entirely on the specialization area. Finally, the dissertation is written for a broader audience of academic scholars, whereas a thesis is written for a limited audience, such as the

research supervisor and the second reader, who are often from the same program (Bui, 2009; Clark, 2007; Roberts, 2010).

According to Sadeghi and Khajepasha (2015), the terms ‘thesis’ and ‘dissertation’ are used to refer to different things as they refer to different connotations in the UK, the USA, Australia, and New Zealand. For instance, master’s students write dissertations in the UK, but they write theses in the USA, and the term thesis is used at both master’s and Ph.D. levels in Australia. A smaller research is mentioned as a dissertation, but a more extended research project written for a master’s or a Ph.D. degree is considered a thesis in New Zealand.

### *Reasons for Writing a Thesis and Dissertation*

The thesis or dissertation writing projects skills and knowledge of framing research, conducting a research study, and preparing research reports in a particular citation style. The graduate school journey demands the successful completion of a thesis or dissertation, which Roberts (2010) calls the summit of academic achievement. A thesis or dissertation is written for two reasons: (1) writing a thesis, or dissertation provides graduate students with an opportunity to conduct fundamental research studies and prepare their reports in prescribed citation styles, and (2) it makes a new contribution to the theory or practice in the world’s academia (Brubaker & Thomas, 2000; Roberts, 2010; Sadeghi & Khajepasha, 2015).

### *Scholarly Article*

A scholarly article reports on an original research study or existing literature on a particular topic (Roberts, 2010; Swales & Feak, 2012). Scholarly articles, as Singh and Lukkarila (2017) claimed, are “peer-reviewed by other researchers within the topic area before they are published to ensure the quality and credibility of research (p. 14). Swales and Feak (2012) argued that scholarly article writers live in a very “competitive environment” (p. 284) because their articles need to undergo a rigorous peer-review process before they are accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. To get accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal, the study’s purpose and research questions should be specific and convincing for the audience. The writer should also justify the significance of their article, show relevant literature reviewed and that their research questions have not been answered yet, and clearly state the study’s methodology and results, followed by a discussion and conclusion. Overall, the scholarly article should be convincing regarding the writer’s positioning by “showing that their research studies are relevant and make some new contribution to the field” (Swales & Feak, 2012, p. 284).

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## *Types of Scholarly Articles*

Singh and Lukkarila (2017) and the University of California (2019) grouped scholarly articles into four types. The first type of article is an empirical or research article that aims to report an original research study in a prescribed citation style. According to Swales and Feak (2012), a research article's main components are title, abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, results, discussion, conclusion, and references. The second type of scholarly article is a literature review or meta-analysis article. The writer surveys the scholarly sources to provide an overview of the existing literature on a particular topic. In this article, the writer also critically evaluates the sources, focusing on their contributions to the field and their shortcomings. The third type of scholarly article is a propositional article in which the writer reviews the existing theories and models to propose a new theory or modify the existing theory in a new perspective or direction. The fourth scholarly article is called a response article. In this article, the writer critically reviews the research published by other researchers and prepares their responses in the form of the article.

## *Differences between Scholarly Article and Thesis or Dissertation*

Two main differences between a scholarly article and a thesis or dissertation exist. First, a scholarly article is shorter than a thesis or dissertation in terms of length. A scholarly article is about 15 to 25 pages, as required by journals, while a thesis or dissertation is from 100 to 300 pages, as required by the nature of the academic program and the research methodology used to conduct the research study. Second, the scholarly article has a broader audience as it is written for a journal publication. In contrast, a thesis or dissertation has a limited audience (i.e., thesis or dissertation committee) as it is written as a requirement for a graduate degree (Joyner et al., 2014).

## **Conclusion**

To become an excellent academic writer in English, it is imperative to have a solid foundational knowledge of AW. In doing so, college and university ESL and EFL students can develop their writing skills to complete their writing assignments. Some college and university students writing assignments generally include descriptive or expository writing, analytical writing, persuasive writing, critical writing, and research-based writing. As academic writers attempt their writing tasks, they must strictly understand and follow the writing process. The multi-step writing process involves generating ideas, outlining, planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing or sharing. In addition to the writing process, they should maintain not only essential elements of AW, namely content, organization, purpose and audience, critical thinking, word choice, grammar, and mechanics, but also the fundamental convention of writing that include objectivity, formality or style, citation style, simplicity, clarity and conciseness, and genre awareness. Finally, some research-based writing that college and university students need to gain mastery include reading responses or reaction

papers, reflection papers, research papers, theses, and dissertations. These are major research-based writing assignments for master's and doctoral students.

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