

TIPS ON ACADEMIC WRITING

Pezdzisai Ndagurwa

One of the main challenges to succeeding at university is submitting an assignment written in appropriate academic expression. Knowing the answer is only the first of two steps to passing; appropriately writing the answer is the other. It is fundamental to realise that the two steps never work in isolation. There is need, therefore, to acquire a few skills on the art of academic writing.

What is an academic writing style? The style of academic writing entails an amalgam of different technical aspects that make an essay ‘academic’. Academic writing is **formal**, **concise**, **impersonal**, and uses **others** to present an argument.

***Formal***

There is no room for ‘casual’ language in assignments; the aim is not to produce a casual interaction with the marker. Words such as: ‘stuff’, ‘really’ and ‘things’, and phrases like ‘a bit’ and ‘sort of’, among others, are not acceptable in academic writing. Sentence fragments that are perfectly acceptable in everyday speech, for example, ‘Not at all…’ and ‘Which he didn’t…’ must be avoided in academic writing. The same applies to abbreviations such as ‘e.g.’, ‘i.e.’, ‘and so on’, and ‘etc.’.

***Concise***

The shorter the sentences, the better. Use the fewest possible words and avoid double negatives and long circular descriptions (circumlocutions). The following pairs of sentences and phrases are examples of what is recommended versus what is not:

For the reason that…or in light of the fact that..., instead of ‘because’.

He was usually not on time…, instead of ‘He usually arrived late’.

This essay is going to discuss…, instead of ‘This essay discusses’.

Using short, concise sentences produces more compact arguments, hence better essays. If what has been written can be misinterpreted, it is vague, and is therefore wrong.

***Impersonal***

Academic writing is impersonal. Writing in the first person is not allowed. ‘I’, ‘my’ or ‘me’ (first person singular) or ‘we’, ‘our’ or ‘us’ (first person plural) cannot be used. Instead of writing ‘I am surprised that…’ write ‘It is surprising that…’. Some types of assignments however, allow the use of the first person, for example, when reporting (‘I observed a group of…’) or reflecting (‘I have learned that…’).

***Others***

Academic writing acknowledges what others have previously done and thought about a subject of interest. Being honest is highly valued in the academic world. Therefore, accurate quotation and citation are crucial components of academic writing. University rules on plagiarism emphasise the importance of referencing. Plagiarising is claiming ownership of what belongs to another person; it is not different from stealing. So do not steal!

The above is not an exhaustive list of technical aspects of academic writing. There is more. However, mastering the four aspects discussed above will enable one to successfully submit excellent essays by understanding the question and expressing the answer appropriately.

ESSAY WRITING

Khumbulani Shabalala & Nkululeko Ngcobo

Most academic courses require one to write essays to show one’s understanding of the material presented in lectures as well as additional readings. This essay will outline how to structure an academic essay, so that the reader can follow and appreciate the essay’s ideas. Firstly an outline of what an introduction entails will be presented, followed by discussing the core of body paragraphs. Lastly the essence of concluding and what a conclusion entails will be discussed.

In any form of academic writing it is of great importance to introduce the paper to one’s reader. Thus, the introduction provides the reader with some insight regarding what the paper is going to cover. It is essential to grab the reader’s attention with an opening statement or perhaps some background information, without divulging much. Once the attention has been hooked, one should follow through with the thesis statement. The thesis statement is the most important part of the introductory paragraph, as it is the concise wording outlining what the body entails and indicates the writer’s stance in relation to the topic. Ending the introduction with a transitional sentence is vital as it helps the essay flow seamlessly throughout. This transitional sentence gives the reader a brief outline or idea of what is to follow in the body of the essay.

The body is crucial to the structure of the essay as it solidifies what was affirmed in the thesis. Each paragraph ought to have one controlling idea or claim. The paragraph should explain why that particular point supports the topic through substantiation using evidence and examples. This must also be sustained by an explanation of these facts. This generally means the paragraph will go into more detail regarding the main points mentioned in the introductory paragraph. Each paragraph should end by concluding or reinforcing the claim made on the onset.

The essence of a conclusion is to tie the information presented in the body back to the thesis statement. When concluding, the thesis statement ought to be restated and the body paragraphs summarized to clearly outline how the conclusion came about. A conclusion is not just merely a summary of the essay but it also signals that the essay has come to an end.

The introduction, body, and the conclusion are all vital parts of an essay because each section provides both structure that makes the essay flow seamlessly and important information that solidifies the thesis statement. The introduction sets the tone as well as introducing the topic, while the body goes in depth regarding the discussion, and the conclusion summarizes the essay and signals the end of the essay.

CARBON EMMISIONS TAX – WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON BUSINESS?

Nozipho Goba

It is becoming more and more important that companies be cautious about how they transport products to customers and what types of transportation they utilize. There are large amounts of carbon that are emitted by trucks during transportation, thus it is important that companies count their carbon emission percentage. To reduce carbon emission, companies need to minimise the use of energy. Unless a company has minimal carbon emissions, they can expect to pay high taxes for the carbon that they emit.

The aim of carbon tax is to reduce the risk of South Africa’s exports being subject to border carbon adjustment tariffs (Treasury, 2013). The initiation of the carbon tax will allow for the early development and/or implementation of cleaner technologies (Treasury, 2013). According to the National Treasury (2013) the carbon tax will also enhance the development of technologies for capturing and storing carbon. The National Treasury (2013) proposes that the carbon tax be introduced as part of a package of interventions; the purpose for doing so is to ensure that the primary objective of reducing greenhouse gas is achieved.

Companies such as logistics companies will be negatively impacted by the proposed carbon tax levels. According to the 7th Annual State of Logistics survey, South Africa’s consistently high cost of logistics will be negatively impacted due to the proposed taxation levels (Imperiallogistics, 2013). Imperial Logistics Chief Executive Officer, Marius Swanepoel, says that the proposed carbon tax will need to be counteracted with greener, more efficient supply chains (Imperiallogistics, 2013). The carbon tax will lead to an increased logistics cost for many logistics companies, thus adding a further cost to the already high cost of logistics. According to Imperiallogistics (2013), the carbon tax could increase the effective tax rate of the industry by 14,5 percent, which would make South African Logistics costs much higher and further place the country’s competitiveness under threat (Imperiallogistics, 2013).

In summary, on one hand logistics companies will pay a high price due to the carbon tax and this may lead to the cost extending over to the customers. On the other hand, it can boost the economy of the country and reduce carbon emissions ensuring a safer and cleaner environment.

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH EMS

Loftty Mmola

Adapting to a new environment, high work load and working under time pressure are some of the challenges that we encounter as University students. To survive these challenges, proper guidance from our predecessors is essential. The lack of such guidance will see the non-realisation of our dreams of success in our respective professions, which in turn means that the nation’s future is gradually destroyed.

It is because of challenges such as those listed above that the need for programmes such as EMS arises. The EMS programme combines mainstream and augmented studies, thus ensuring the academic success of students who are sponsored by different companies. All this is done through mentorship, continuous academic support and ensuring that students get some sort of exposure to the activities that take place in the corporate world while they are still at university.

I feel privileged and honoured to be a part of this program.

The journey started is 2010 when I ventured into the Bachelor of Commerce field. Being a 17 year- old young boy from a different province (Gauteng), with no proper direction as to where I wanted to go in life were some of the problems I faced as a first year student. Luckily, I was introduced to the warm hands of the EMS programme. Induction, mentorship and the presentations that were delivered by highly respected people from various organisations, were among the things that opened my eyes and made it easy to adapt to this new environment. In no time, I had already adapted to the university’s facilities and operations and also, even though it was not that clear at that time, I had some sort of idea of what I wanted to achieve in life.

Through the attendance of leadership programmes and winter schools, such as those the EMS programme organised for us in 2010 and 2011, I was taught that decision making, team work, hard work and tenacity despite failure are some of the qualities that draw a line between one being successful and not. I learnt all of these from the activities I participated in which, at some point, took me out of my comfort zone and made me realise that without the qualities I listed above, success would remain as an unachievable goal for me.

The lessons I have learnt from these activities have not just remained as an experience I have had, but I have also had to apply them in real life situations, such as my studies, to prove that they are really essential. The rewards of such applications have not gone unnoticed, as the EMS programme, recognised me several times for my excellent performance in my studies through awarding me certificates. As an aspiring economist, my behaviour is controlled by incentives offered in a particular situation. As a result, the more I was rewarded with certificates, the harder I worked so that I would be rewarded again the next time.

Through all the, help and motivation I have received from the programme, I am a graduate today with a Bcom degree in Economics and Applied Economics. All this would have not been possible without the help from the programme. I am so happy to have been part of the programme, and wish that it continues to do for others what it has done for me.

ACCOUNTANTS ARE WRITERS TOO

Shenice Pillay

Number crunchers, bean counters, ledger lovers, provision peddlers, journal junkies and an academic writing whizz. Bet you didn’t see the last one coming.

Accountants have been stereotyped as many things, surrounded by the belief that they are only good at accounting; what many people forget is that writing skills are an essential element in their success. Individuals in the accounting profession must not only master the concepts and appropriate application of GAAP and IFRS, but must also show that they can communicate this information and their understanding of it to their peers, superiors and clients.

According to reports, a high percentage of accounting firms report poor writing skills as a major reason for job termination. An accountant must be able to take abstract terms and put them into concrete concepts that almost anyone can understand. He/she should be able to show how their idea can be useful and profitable for the firm for which they work, and should be able to convey information in an accessible fashion through proper construction of words and sentences that may build on one complex idea.

Today accounting is not only about journal entries, tax returns and calculations. It is also about presenting financial information to the reader, communicating information effectively, stating facts and giving opinions, which are supported by research and reading, in a conservative manner. It is a very precise job, and usage of the right word for the exact idea is of paramount importance

After a student graduates, recruiters are not only looking for the grades they earn, but they also care about what abilities and skills this student has and how he/she would benefit the company. It is understandable that turning such financial information into a coherent report that can be analyzed and utilized is no simple task; like many things, however, it can be achieved with practice.

WRITING FOR FINANCE

Sahil Maharaj

Whether you are sending an e-mail message or performing a forecast or valuation, your study in Finance will require you to communicate information effectively by the use of academic and business writing. A few hallmarks of good academic and business writing entail the use of good grammar, communicating the message in a concise and organised manner, whilst accrediting others’ ideas or frameworks that you may have adapted in your analysis.

The UKZN Writing Place views writing as a process that culminates in a product. This is a view that is by not only students in the Finance field but in other fields requiring good academic writing skills, too. If you engage with lecturers and professors about the research and writing that they are busy with, you begin to discover that the “product” mindset is the phenomenon that drives their academic writing pieces.

The process includes initial research and note-taking, rough drafts, editing, followed by the production of the final document or “product”. In practice, a memo or report will be read at the draft stages by fellow researchers or workers, who make comments on the document and give it back to the original writer for revision. The document may go through numerous revisions before it reaches its final form and is sent off to its intended final audience. Similarly, a well-written article, chapter overview or a report on a particular corporation should go through a number of revisions before it is submitted.

Most academics in the School of Finance are willing to read a rough draft and return it with comments and suggestions. Whether you are evaluating a corporation, analyzing a stock, or researching a topic of interest to you in finance, you should begin the research and writing process as soon as possible. Putting off the writing of a paper to a week or a few days before it is due, only make the process more difficult. Lecturers want to see that you have read the relevant material, utilized the proper valuation models, or analyzed and made sense of the data before you sit down and begin to type. You need time to reflect on your findings before you can write anything about the significance of what you have found. Half-digested blocks of paraphrased information stitched together with a few of your own words will not add up to a well-organized research paper.

As with all Schools, The School of Finance requires that students submit work that is not plagiarized. This means not taking someone else's words or ideas and representing them as your own. Plagiarism is expressly prohibited by the University regulations. Good academic writing must be based on honesty and referencing systems, such as the Harvard Referencing system as utilised by UKZN. The Writing Place, can assist you with accrediting others’ ideas in your academic writing assignments.

The UKZN Writing Place is at your disposal for assistance with the guidelines mentioned. You are welcome to come in and book a consultation with one of the tutors and receive any further guidance and clarity on issues that you may be facing in preparing academic writing assignments in finance.

WRITING A LITERATURE REVIEW

Mlungisi Sithole

A literature review is the evaluation of chosen documents on a research topic. This forms an important section of the research process or it may constitute to a research project in itself (Hart, 1998). On the other hand, in terms of a research paper or thesis, the literature review is a synthesis of previous research. The evaluation of the literature directs logically to the research hypothesis. The main purpose of the review is to give background information on the field of interest, distinguish on what has been done from what needs to be done, discovering important variables relevant to the topic and establish the context of the topic or problem. Moreover, it serves as an aid to synthesizing and gaining a new perspective, understanding the structure of the project and enhancing and acquiring the subject vocabulary. The background may take into account various aspects, depending on the research hypothesis. These may include theoretical background, clinical practice, methodology, previous findings and rationale and/or relevance of the study (Hart, 1998).

The literature review process includes various steps. The initial task is to select a review topic. After the topic has been selected, one would have to search for, gather, read and analyse the literature. Writing and referencing become one the final steps one has to undertake. Herein, the strategies for conducting some of the processes for literature review will be discussed.

Selecting a review topic can be a daunting task for students and novice reviewers (Timmis and McCabe, 2005). The general problem for novices is to select a review title that encompasses everything. Although the creation of an all-encompassing title may be a powerful technique for finding out how much is available, very broad subjects such as these create a remarkable amount of data, making a review unworkable (Patricia et al, 2008). Thus, it is very important to make the amount of information manageable; this can be done through refining. Reading around the topic of interest can also help the researcher to ascertain what areas of the subject he/she may be interested in and also help to indicate how much information exists on the topic at that particular time (Timmis and McCabe, 2005).

After selecting the topic, the reviewer will have to identify, in a structured way, the appropriate and related information through the application of a systematic approach (Patricia et al, 2008).According to Newell and Burnard (2006), reviewers need to take into account both the comprehensiveness and relevance of information. In addition to that, the more specific the topic or question of interest, the more focused the results will be. These days, literature searches are conducted utilising computers and electronic databases. These give access to huge quantities of information, which can be retrieved more easily and quickly than searching manually (Younger, 2004).

During the analysis and synthesis of the literature, all the information determined as appropriate literature will be gathered. While the focus of the literature may vary depending on the overall purpose, there are several useful strategies for the analysis and synthesis stages that will help the construction and writing of the review (Newell and Burnard, 2006). Firstly, it is of vital importance to begin by reading the summary or abstracts of the articles that have been gathered in order to get an idea of what they are about. The decision to discard or accept a particular article can be made after reading the summary or abstract (Newell and Burnard, 2006).

A literature review is central to the research process and can help refine a research question through determining inconsistencies in a body of knowledge. Similarly, it can help inspire new research innovations and ideas while creating greater understanding about a topic. It can enable a novice researcher to gain insight into designs for a further study, as well as providing information on data collection and analysis tools. Whether the approach is qualitative or quantitative will often dictate when and how the research is carried out. Various types of literature reviews may be used depending on the reason for performing the review, as well as the overall aims and objectives of the research. Writing a review of the literature is a skill that needs to be learnt. By conducting literature reviews and research around a particular topic, one can be involved in increasing the body of knowledge and ultimately enhancing knowledge.

**References**

Hart, C. (1998) *Doing a Literature Review*: Releasing the social science research imagination, Thousand Oaks, Sage, p. 14.

Newell, R., Burnard, P. (2006) *Research for Evidence – Based Practice*: Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.

Patricia, C., Frances, R. & Michael, C. (2008) ‘Undertaking a literature review: a step – by – step approach’, *British Journal of Nursing*, 17(1): 38 – 43.

Timmins, F., McCabe C. (2005) ‘How to conduct an effective review’, *Nurs Stand*, 20(11): 41 – 7.

Younger, P. (2004) ‘Using the internet to conduct a literature search’, Nurs Stand, 19(6): 45 – 51.

A BOOK REVIEW

Thandekile Mbambo

*Change of Heart* by Jodi Picoult is a book filled with drama, mystery and a little romance. Change of Heart explores spirituality and religion in the context of the death penalty in the state of New Hampshire in the United States of America.

The story is about a death row prisoner, Shay Bourne, who only has one wish: to donate his heart to his victim’s family in attempt to redeem himself. However death by lethal injection will not allow for the heart donation. A pastor, Michael Wright, is brought into the prison to convince Shay that redemption cannot be obtained through organ donation but, rather, that it is received through repentance and seeking God, that God is truly the one who offers redemption and that humans cannot redeem themselves. The twist comes in where Shay performs “miracles” as well as when the pastor realises that he has a history with Shay Bourne. On the other hand a small time lawyer sees an opportunity to make it big and takes Shay on as a client pro bono, not to save him but to give him the redemption he so desperately wants. Little does she realise that this was beginning of her long-awaited love story. Through the life of Shay Bourne in the state prison, we meet other prisoners who contribute to author’s exploration of spirituality, religion and other contentious issues like homosexuality. June Nealson, the wife and mother of Shay’s victims is faced with a the hard decision: does she take the heart of the man who killed her daughter and husband in an attempt to save the only family she has or does she let her remaining daughter, Claire, die?

Reading this book was not as easy as my usual readings are largely due to that fact that the book has no fairytale dreamy tone. It has rather a more realistic, yet gripping tone. The story is told from the perspectives of all the main characters in the story which allows for more details and stimulation of one’s imagination. I enjoyed the book because it was nothing like the romance novels I usually read. It was not predictable; the book is full of surprises which is why I could not stop reading it. The characters are all different yet they have a common factor: spirituality, which prevents one from getting lost in an otherwise complex read. This book also highlights the relationship between religion and the constitution on which states are governed.

If you are a reader who enjoys unpredictable stories, filled with drama, mystery and suspense, then this book is definitely for you. Be patient when reading the first few chapters, as the author takes a while before she starts putting her twists and turns to the story but even so, her story remains unpredictable throughout and the surprises are worth the wait.

A WORD ON THE WRITING PLACE

Lauren Daniels

The Writing Place consists of tutors that are currently studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The tutors range from first years to masters students. These tutors offer assistance with all academic writing, no matter which faculty you are in. They provide guidance on what the assignment comprises of, including how you should convey the answer. Additionally, the tutors assist with writing style, structure, grammar and flow. They inform on the correct way to reference your work, offer referencing guides and tutorials. The Writing Place hosts a number of workshops throughout the semester, dealing with topics pertaining to academic writing. Visit the Writing Place at lower lever J-block (J-013), Monday to Friday.

For more information you can view the website: <http://ukznwritingplace.blogspot.com> Alternatively you can find the Writing Place on Facebook (The Writing Place) or on twitter (@ukznwriting)

**Please pay attention to the specified requirements:**

* **Bookings are to be made two weeks prior to the appointment date you request.**
* **All work should be printed and brought to the consultation.**

**Cancellations should be made 48 hours in advance.**

LET THIS LOVE NOT BE DEAD!

Vien Jugwanth

I look into your eyes

Not knowing what to say

Tempted into lies

There be it a flay

The past be teeming in pain

Shallow decisions regretted

Deep beneath the shame

I know I could have bettered

At your will you judge me

For I have left a scar

But you who be free

Let shine as a night star

And as the future lay ahead

Let this love not be dead!