A framework for developing and reviewing academic writing curricula

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Rationale

Academic writing curricula should begin with a clear rationale. This should indicate the broad scope of the course: does it address academic *writing* exclusively, or does it address a broader portfolio of academic skills or study skills? The latter is recommended, as academic writing cannot happen away from academic reading and academic thinking.

The rationale should indicate the target audience for the course. This should indicate whether the course is at bachelor's, master's or doctoral level, and in the case of bachelor's students, it is helpful to distinguish between first year and finalists, as the latter are likely to benefit from a focus on the requirements of their dissertations. Master's and doctoral students are likely to have additional input on research methods, but academic skills courses at bachelor's level might include content on qualitative and quantitative data collection, analysis and presentation methods, depending on students' academic disciplines. The rationale should make clear the academic subject context of the course: whilst there is much that might be addressed through a general academic writing course at institution level, academic and vocational subjects differ in their expectations for students' writing and so

tailored provision may be more appropriate. As the level of the course increases, such subject tailoring may be more important.

Overarching rationales for teaching academic writing can include the desire to prepare students for assignments, the sense of apprenticeship into the craft of the academic (particularly at master's and doctoral level), a view that it is through the expression of students' thinking in written or oral form that learning is effected, and as a means to develop students' thinking skills, such as analysis, argument and criticality.

In providing a rationale for the course, it is helpful to keep in mind both the institution's goals for academic writing courses and how students themselves will benefit from such courses. The rationale should also make clear whether the course is for all students, or is offered as an elective for those who most need it or would most benefit from it. The language of the course should be made clear.

Metadata

The presentation of the course should include easily identifiable information concerning the level using the European qualifications framework (EQF), the subject context, how the course is assessed, the number of contact and non-contact hours required for the course and whether the course is credit bearing. If the course does carry credits then these should be expressed using the European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS). Metadata should indicate whether the course is elective or required and any required prior learning.

Aim

A one or two sentence statement of the aim of the course should be provided, based on the rationale for the course and providing the basis for the course's specific learning outcomes.

Learning outcomes

An academic writing or academic skills course should have no more than ten learning outcomes. These should be in alignment with the overarching rationale for the course and appropriate to the intended audience (ie level and subject if any). The framing of these should take into account national and EQF expectations appropriate to the level of the course.

The learning outcomes specify the nature of the course: the principle of constructive alignment indicates that these should be addressed through the course structure and content, the activities in which students engage, and that they should be assessed. The learning outcomes indicated should be clear, teachable, learnable and assessable: in framing a learning outcome, one should ask: How would we teach this? How would we know if students have learnt this.

Learning outcomes often address skills, knowledge and understanding: students' academic writing capability will draw on all three of these areas. Academic writing courses, particularly in the context of those developed for the Integrity project, should also address academic values.

Academic Writing

Outcomes should encompass all the levels of the 'academic writing triangle', i.e. purpose, structure, integration of research or analysis, references, and sentences, grammar and vocabulary. Outcomes should emphasise the need for students to provide evidence or logical argument in support of their position.

With this project's focus on academic integrity, particular attention should be given to how to draw correctly on literature, including the appropriate use of précis and paraphrase. Students should learn how to cite sources correctly within their text and how to present a detailed bibliography using the referencing conventions for the domain and institution. Some courses might include teaching students how to use bibliography management software.

In addressing both consideration of structure and low-level skills for sentence construction, grammar and vocabulary, outcomes should emphasise the need for clarity, precision and brevity rather than adopting an artificially academic tone. Whilst the conventions of academic texts and specific domains should be observed (particularly with postgraduate students) these should not take precedence over students' being able to communicate clearly, concisely and effectively. Objectives might also include helping students to consider the audience and purpose of their writing.

For bachelor's students, outcomes might be chosen for alignment to the specific assessment requirements of other modules undertaken by students, particularly for dissertations.

Academic Reading

It is hard to separate academic reading and academic writing, and academic writing courses, as well as broader academic skills courses, should include some learning objectives specifically addressing academic reading. These might include information literacy skills, from finding books in a library through searching online databases for journal articles to identifying whether a particular text or paper is relevant to the student's area of study. Reading skills might include conducting a literature review and, for postgraduate students, developing literature search strategies and conducting systematic reviews.

Academic reading learning objectives might include note-taking, précis and development of annotated bibliographies.

Academic Thinking

Whilst harder to pin down than either writing skills or reading skills, academic writing or skills courses might include learning outcomes concerned with developing students' ability to think and argue effectively. Learning outcomes might include critical thinking, analysis and reflexivity. The traditional 'trivium' of grammar, logic and rhetoric might provide one structure for developing academic thinking, and learning objectives might include

analysing and evaluating arguments in academic texts, looking for fallacies and/or a formal treatment of Aristotelian logic.

Academic Values

Objectives should include nurturing the values shared by the academic community, such as respectful debate, intellectual honesty and diligence. The ethics of academic research might be addressed through research methods courses, but the ethical codes for national and domain specific research communities might help frame learning objectives for academic writing courses.

Students should understand the nature of plagiarism and why this is incompatible with academic study. They should have an understanding of its consequences within their institution's disciplinary procedures and within the wider academic community.

Broader academic skills

Depending on the specific rationale and context of the course, learning objectives might extend to a broader portfolio of academic skills, such as oral presentations, debate, communication skills beyond the academic community, preparation of multimedia presentations or videos and the visual presentation of quantitative data.

Students can be taught how to participate effectively in group work, how to plan projects, avoid procrastination and manage deadlines. Course developers should consider whether such skills should be taught in academic writing courses or developed through support services or other channels.

Similarly, students undertaking research will need to study methods appropriate to their investigations within the context of the domain. For some institutional contexts it may be appropriate to draw together research methods courses with input on academic writing.

Assessment

Credit bearing courses should include some summative assessment of students' learning. The principle of constructive alignment requires that this be matched to the learning outcomes, and the summative assessment itself should be designed to promote the intended learning in the course. It is possible that no single assignment might address all learning outcomes, and thus a number of assessment components might be used. Academic writing courses typically carry relatively few ECTS credits and there is a danger that the assessment demands are disproportionate to the credits awarded. Whilst sometimes unavoidable, there is no *need* for summative assessment to assess the same criteria more than once.

Awarding grades for summative assessment should be done on the basis of a rubric, shared with students at the beginning of the course. This should link to the learning objectives of the course, making clear how each is graded for any particular assignment. Rubric grading typically indicates the standard of work that is awarded a range of marks for each of the assessment criteria.

The details of the specific assignments need to be clearly expressed so that students understand exactly what is required of them. In academic writing courses, particular attention should be paid to expectations about the standards expected for written (or oral) language, the formatting of submitted work and the citation and referencing conventions to be used. The penalties for plagiarism and for work under or over the required length should be clear, making reference to the appropriate institutional policies.

All courses (whether credit bearing or not), should include some formative assessment, to provide students with some indication of their progress in the course and to support their retention of new content. Formative assessment approaches can include self-, peer- and automated assessment, as well as feedback from academic and support staff. In well-resourced contexts, individual or small group tutorials in which draft assignments are discussed can be highly effective.

Care is needed in assessing generic academic writing courses taken by students across multiple disciplines: assessment rubrics need to be framed so that subject-specific content of essays or other assignments is not assessed by academics without expertise in the domain - given that learning outcomes focus on academic writing, assessment rubrics on courses such as these should similarly focus on the form and structure of the writing, reading and argument rather than the subject content of assignments.

Assessment components could include, but need not be restricted to, the following:

- Essay: students should independently research, plan and write an essay of a set length in response to a given title. The title may be generic or specific to their academic discipline. Set texts may be given on which students' essays should draw. It is likely that some learning objectives for an academic writing course can only be effectively assessed through this form.

- Essay plan: rather than requiring a complete essay, students might be asked to submit a detailed plan for an essay; this format would work well for formative assessment.

- Annotated bibliography: to provide a focus on academic reading, students could be asked to select a number of relevant articles or other sources, supplementing bibliographic references with a short summary or précis of the article.

- Journal: students might be required to maintain a blog or reading record for their course, summarising their readings, responding to set tasks and reflecting on their progress.

- Individual presentation: recognising the need for visual and oral communication as well as the written word, students might be asked to research, prepare and deliver a short, timed presentation on a set topic. Similarly students could be asked to produce a short, video essay on a topic, although the demands on technical skills here should not be underestimated.

- Group presentation: recognising that academic (and other) work requires strong collaboration and team work skills, students might be assigned to small groups to research, prepare and deliver a shared presentation on a given topic. Assessment

rubrics should include some credit for individual contributions and effective team work.

- Discussion: students might be asked to prepare short position statements on a given topic, present these within a small group and then debate with one another arguments for or against a particular proposition.

- Exams (long form response): some aspects of academic writing can be assessed through written response questions, perhaps asking students to argue against, analyse, evaluate or précis an unseen text.

- Quiz (short form questions): some aspects of academic writing, such as vocabulary choice, sentence structure, tone, citations and referencing can be assessed through simple, short form questions, including multiple choice questions. This form can be helpful for both summative and formative assessment, in the latter case allowing students to see immediately when they have misunderstood or misinterpreted a particular convention.

Course structure

In traditional, face to face courses or online learning sequences the course designer must carefully structure course content so that there is a coherent, logical order to the presentation of material, helping students to organise new skills, knowledge and understanding into mental schema, and carefully building on existing and newly formed knowledge structures. Even where course content is provided as a collection of online content for students to explore independently, care needs to be given to organising the presentation of this according to understandable principles.

Organising course content from the concrete to the abstract may be helpful in supporting students' construction of mental schema.

The academic writing triangle (purpose, structure, integration of research or analysis, references, and sentences, grammar and vocabulary) provides one organising principle for a course, with content structured to traverse this list in either direction. The traditional

trivium of grammar, logic and rhetoric could provide a structure for an academic skills course, as could the similar reading, thinking, writing process. Such structures might need some modification if the course is extended to include collaborative group work, research methods and/or oral and visual presentation elements.

For courses linked to particular tasks, such as bachelor's or master's dissertations and doctoral theses, the structure of these texts might suggest a similar structure to the accompanying academic writing course, for example moving from the audience and purpose of the dissertation through literature review, methods and ethics, presentation of data, analysis and argument to conclusion and bibliography, although such an end-results structure might give a false impression of the academic writing process itself.

One common format is to allow the learning objectives to drive the structure of the course, addressing each objective in turn as the course progresses. There is much to commend such a structure, assuming objectives are sound, but course developers should additionally help students to make the connections between objectives: reading informs thinking, and both feed into writing, which in turn refines thinking.

Activities

Again the principle of constructive alignment should determine the activities in each lecture, workshop, follow-up or online engagement planned within the course. Course developers should aim, where possible, for students' active engagement in learning activities: listening to lectures and reading texts can play a significant role in students' learning, but these should be supplemented by more interactive activities, perhaps sometimes led by students themselves, to facilitate schema construction and a sense of putting into practice what students have been taught.

Course developers should also ensure alignment between activities within the course and the assessment of the course: for example, the opportunity to work with other students on

planning an essay, and perhaps receiving feedback from their peers, would align constructively with the submission of a formal essay.

Learning activities within an academic writing or skills course might include some of the following, but need no be limited to this:

- analysing texts: students can be given a text and asked to analyse it at any level in the 'writing triangle'. They might be asked to analyse the logical structure of arguments or evaluate the weight of evidence offered by the text's authors.

- brainstorming: typically working with their peers, students could suggest ideas in response to a prompt, with the intention of simply generating lots of possibilities for subsequent evaluation

- case study: students might take a particular text as an example for their own work, perhaps exploring how its author planned and constructed the text or conducted the research on which the paper is based.

- concept mapping: students create a diagram showing how concepts are related to the central, starting idea and to one another.

- correcting: students are given a passage (or a reference) with deliberate errors and have to find and correct these. Errors might be in spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, referencing or the logical argument of a text.

- criticism: students are provided with a text and must critique the author's argument.

- debate: students prepare statements for or against a given proposition, then formally debate these, taking turns to support or attach the proposition and providing respectful criticism of the opposing position.

- detecting plagiarism: students might be given a short passage with all citations removed and asked to identify any sections where they would question whether the material was by the named author.

- discussion: students might research a topic in advance of the session, then meet together to share their reflections, insights and questions.

- drafting: students might be asked to prepare a draft of an essay or a section of an essay, subsequently receiving feedback from their tutor or peers.

- feedback: students can give feedback to work written or presented by other students; they should also have opportunity to receive formative and summative feedback on their own work, perhaps indicating particular strengths, elements that should be corrected or targets for subsequent work.

- flipped learning: the content of the course is delivered through set readings or, more typically, prepared video lectures, allowing lecture time for more interactive engagement such as group discussions, reviewing drafts or question and answer sessions.

- group work: students might be asked to engage in activities as part of a collaborative group rather than as individuals. Students might form their own groups, or these could be assigned by tutors. Roles within the group may evolve naturally or be assigned by tutors.

- lectures: the conventional oral presentation of content by a domain expert, typically to large numbers of students, often accompanied by visual presentation slides. Lectures may be recorded in audio or video to allow prior or subsequent review and access to those absent.

- note taking: students might be asked to take a set of outline or more detailed notes on a written text.

- paraphrase: students rewrite a given passage in their own words

- peer review: students submit written or oral work for review by their peers, receiving feedback; they in turn provide feedback to other students on their submissions.

- planning: students develop an outline plan for an essay or presentation.

- précis: students prepare a detailed summary of a text, typically to a set length requirement. Students can also be asked to write an abstract for a paper.

- presenting: students deliver a short talk on a prepared topic, typically to an audience of their peers. The talk would normally be accompanied by visual presentation slides.

- reading: the quality of students' writing is largely determined by the quality of their reading, and academic writing courses should thus provide the repeated opportunity for students to read academic work of an exemplary standard. Such exemplary work might be taken from students' own disciplines or be selected from the most significant papers from across academic disciplines. It is an interesting task to identify what such a corpus of exemplary papers should include.

- reflection: students are asked to reflect on what they have learnt, and how they have responded to set tasks, encouraging the development of metacognition as they step back from the task to consider what they have learnt from completing the task.

- reviewing literature: students are given one or more texts, or search for relevant texts themselves, and construct a written (or oral) review of the literature, summarising the argument of each piece, evaluating each, grouping texts into categories and drawing distinctions between different author's findings.

- role play: students take on a particular role or perspective and conduct a discussion from the artificial perspective of that role. Role play can allow students to take a more critical perspective on their peer's work, or to contribute in a different way to group work, as they can adopt the persona of their assigned or chosen role

- writing: academic writing courses should afford students with plenty of opportunity to write. Students might select their own topic, or be assigned topics by tutors. A range of forms might be used, from short introductory passages to more formal essays, literature reviews, reports or journal articles.

Readings

As well as exemplar readings provided to students to support the development of their own academic writing, their are many good texts available on academic writing as a subject.

Set texts and additional readings will feed into course development at a number of levels in the above framework. A course text might be chosen for close alignment with the overarching aims and objectives of the course. Each session might include one or more preparatory or follow-up readings. Session activities might draw on these or other readings.

Analysis of Georgian HEIs existing academic writing curricula suggest the following titles might be useful additions to lists of recommended readings for academic writing courses. In presenting such a list to students, course developers should model the referencing format preferred by their institution and/or subject discipline.

Gillet, A, Hammond, A and Martala, M (2009) Successful Academic Writing. Pearson Longman.

Glasman-Deal, H (2010) Science Research Writing, for non-native speakers of English. Imperial College Press.

Gochitashvili K, Shabashvili G and Sharashenidze N (2012) Academic Writing. Tbilisi: Saimmedo

Kacharava, L, Martskvishvili, K, Khechuashvili, L (2007), Academic Writing for Beginners. Tbilisi

Hogue, A and Oshima, A (1997) Introduction to Academic Writing. Longman.

Ruszkiewicz, J J and Dolmage, J T (2012) How to Write Anything: A Guide and Reference. Second edition. Bedfor/St Martin's, Boston, New York.

Shulman, M (2005) In Focus: Strategies for Academic Writers. University of Michigan Press ELT

Swales, J and Feak, C B (2000) Academic Writing for Graduate Students: A course for non-native speakers of English.

Michigan Tsuladze, L (2006) Academic writing. Tbilisi: Center for Social Sciences.

Turabian, K L (2007) A Manual for writers of research papers, theses, and dissertations: Chicago style for students and researchers. University of Chicago Press

Checklist

Below is a summary of recommendations given above, presented as a simple list that course developers and reviewers might use to analyse academic writing courses

Preamble

- Rationale for the course
- EQF Level
- ECTS credits
- Scope of academic subjects
- Contact and non-contact hours
- Aim

Objectives

- Academic writing objectives
- Covers all levels of writing triangle (purpose, structure, integration of research or analysis, references, and sentences, grammar and vocabulary)
- Academic reading objectives

- Academic thinking objectives
- Academic values addressed in objectives
- Course addresses broader academic skills

Assessment

- Formative elements
- Summative elements
- Variety of approaches
- Assignment clearly explained
- Constructive alignment with objectives
- Assessment rubric provided
- Plagiarism addressed
- Includes essay
- Includes presentation

Course structure

- Logical sequence or organising principle
- Clearly explained

Activities

- Addresses content delivery
- Opportunities for student-led activities
- Opportunities for collaborative group work
- Includes reading
- Includes writing

Readings

- Includes texts about academic writing

- Includes exemplary texts for academic writing