

What is Academic Writing?

- ✓ Writing that presents information and demonstrates research, and which articulates intellectual ideas, theses, hypotheses, and theories about a topic/ set of topics.
- ✓ Writing that is demonstrative, i.e. showing new evidence or new hypotheses about a particular topic.
- ✓ Writing that is rhetorical/ persuasive, i.e. making truth-claims based on evidence and convincing the reader of the validity of the claim(s).
- ✓ Writing that is informed, i.e. develops on existing research/ ideas in order to expand the given field and/or to inform policy, culture, social and professional practices, the public imagination, etc. (Referencing + Dissemination).
- ✓ All of this together = writing that creates new knowledge.

How is it Different?

- The **standard** of academic writing is higher than it is at second-level education, i.e. better understanding of the rules of the written word (grammar, syntax, punctuation), greater precision, a broader vocabulary, ability to limit focus, etc.
- Writing at the university is not just about “repackaging” information learned by rote, i.e. it is **original thinking** and should be more focused on intellectual inquiry/ exploration, the dissemination of ideas/ research, and persuasion.
- Academic writing usually takes the form of an **argument** or adopts a specific angle on a topic. Alternatively (and more broadly), academic writing presents key findings for a defined purpose.
- Academic writing requires **analysis**, i.e. the interpretation of evidence/ data combined with logical conclusions based exclusively on that evidence.
- Academic writing is **less concerned with description** (although it still has its place).
- It should be **objective**, detached, and clinical.
- Academic writing participates in **peer-review** and broader communities/ conversations.
- It is often **precise/ narrow** in focus.
- Your writing in university should maintain a **professional** tone, i.e. not informal, journalistic, or “bloggy”. It should also be presented professionally in terms of layout and readability.
- It guides the reader using **clear language** (not “fancy” language).
- Stick to the **limited frameworks** such as word count, time, rubrics and recommendations, i.e. you are partly being assessed on your ability to meet deadlines, to adhere effectively to constraints, and to delineate between what is important/ useful/ necessary and what is not.
- Formal/specific **structures**, e.g. essay, report, literature review, annotated bibliography, dissertation, etc.
- Academic writing **tells a story** about research.

Academic Writing and Storytelling

“Academics are a privileged lot. Our job is to (1) think of questions other people haven’t thought of and identify questions that haven’t been answered, (2) figure out how to answer them, (3) do it, and then (4) tell the story. However, if your doctoral training was anything like mine, or like most of the doctoral programs I’ve been involved in or exposed to in the twenty-plus years since receiving my degree, the bulk of your training focused on parts two and three (i.e., research design and analytical techniques), with a reasonable amount of attention given to part 1 in your theory and content seminars, and almost no attention given to part 4 – storytelling. [...] However, storytelling is what we do in every article, book chapter and book we write; in every presentation we give; and in every class we teach. Data does not speak for itself; the author must set the context for interpretation, ensure readers understand and accept the question’s importance, and finally frame and interpret the implications of the results in ways that give the data meaning”

- Timothy G. Pollock, *How to Use Storytelling in Your Academic Writing*, 2021.

The Importance of Form in Academic Writing

“In order to creatively express your ideas you have to understand the constraints and demands of the form you are writing in. I have heard complaints about the journal article format and how it inhibits writers’ abilities to develop and express their ideas. My response to such whining is, ‘Does that mean you can’t be creative writing a haiku, then, or a sonnet, because they have restrictive forms?’ Every writing form, from limericks to novels to academic journal articles, has specific structures and norms. Forms provide structure that help readers know what to expect and how to find meaning. While some forms are more flexible than others, the creativity comes from successfully conveying what you want within the bounds of the form, not from devising a new and unfamiliar form. Successful academic writers, rather than complaining about the strictures of the journal article form, figure out how to work successfully within it.”

- Timothy G. Pollock, *How to Use Storytelling in Your Academic Writing*, 2021.

Common Types of Academic Assignments

- Essays
- Close Readings
- Literature Reviews
- Reports
- Critical Reflections
- Document Analyses
- Presentations
- Case Notes
- Annotated Bibliographies

These are just a few examples of types of assignments you may encounter in university. More information about each, and others, can be found through the UCD Writing Centre website