



Creating Conditions for (International) Student Success: Crafting, Teaching, & Grading Writing Assignments

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Cultures of Learning: “Good” Academic Writing

Valuing Written Accents: International Voices in the U.S. Academy: <http://writtenaccents.gmu.edu/>

- Role of writer’s opinion
- Critical thinking
- Use of others’ Ideas
- Argument structure
- Style

Role of the Writer's Opinion

➤ Sandarshi

What's good writing here can be completely nonsense in my country. It is, to a certain extent. If I take an essay that an American student wrote and show it to a professor in my home country, they would say "what is this? This is not academic writing. This is someone's personal view? I don't care what that person's personal view is. This is not what I have taught."

➤ Particularly academic writing is more objective in Sri Lanka, not so subjective. You don't bring your personal opinion; people don't care about your personal opinion; you just analyze the data in a more clinical fashion back home. You write in the third person. You would never insert "I" into an academic piece. Ever. You'd always write in the third person. It wouldn't be appropriate.

Use of Others' Ideas

- **Sri:**

The final papers which you had to answer were normally from the topics in the text and so when you answered, it was mostly by memorization, you know; so if you were just reproducing the texts, it was okay. I believe now there are a lot of systemic changes. It was not called plagiarism. The more effectively you could produce, the better grades you got.
- **Ying:**

There is a famous Chinese saying: “All papers in the world are written by copying/plagiarizing others.” However, plagiarism is never approved by any teachers. It is an unspoken process.
- **Ayesha**

We didn't have a concept of plagiarism. We were supposed to memorize stuff and put it down on the paper, and obviously it wasn't our thoughts; it was someone else's and that's complete plagiarism. And sometimes we used to write word for word. I remember there was a teacher and if I missed one line, she would say “okay, you are missing this line.” And now I realize they were teaching us plagiarism.

Argument Structure

➤ **Tonka:**

At the beginning, my [native] language influenced my writing in terms of wording. I remember my first essays; I started writing them the ways that I was taught in high school to write, in a more abstract way, in the way of like going around the topic, but sometimes you would never actually get to your point. Just going around it and making your reader connect the dots and get to your point. That was emphasized a lot. This abstract writing. I guess, *reader responsible writing. Making the reader think about it, this was valued.*

➤ When I had my first conference with my English professor here, he said “remember, you are not writing for Germans, you are writing for Americans”. So he pointed out the audience and how, I guess, English audience relied on writer responsible pieces instead of reader responsible pieces. But then I started reading in English and I saw how professors started expecting me to write. So reading in English was a lot, a lot of help in getting the point: “get to your point. State your point and support it instead of leading me to your point.” So it was a lot of impact. I was struggling with that, but with the reading, it all came into place now.

➤ **Malak:**

In Saudi Arabia, they are very different. It's using the words to draw a picture and it's not like using the wording in its simple meaning. So you use the wording differently and using not less simple words or simple structures. It's different than in English because in English it's better to have more simple structure in English. Here, I've been told it's better to have a little less complicated; don't use three or four words, like I said, having a simple structure, cleanly writing the ideas that you have...

➤ **Ignacio's advice to new students:**

I would tell them [students coming from Spain] to be really concise, to keep in simple. Not to use fancy words or expressions in English even though to him it may sound better; they are really needless. I would tell him to just explain the best he can the topic he is focusing on.

Cultures of Learning

- “Good” Academic Writing
- Previous English Instruction

Previous English Instruction

- Simplistic Genres and Topics
- Focus on Grammar
- Lack of Instruction in Writing (Process)
- At UCB: R & C courses

“Simplistic” Genres and Topics

➤ **Jay (a Cal junior):**

At first, when I was about to write an essay that directs the reader to the points I want to make smoothly, I was confused a lot. It was different from the writings that I used to write (high school level essay that emphasized structure, logic). The typical SAT style 1-3-1 format was something that I was gotten used to.

➤ **Ayesha**

And they were like small topics: your best friend, your best book, your favorite music, really small topics. And they are still using the same topic. They never change themselves.

Focus on Grammar

➤ Jay:

Regarding the writing education in my high school compared to other high schools in Korea, there does not exist rigorous curriculum of English writing in other 'regular' Korean high schools. My high school, which was one of the top private high schools in Korea, especially emphasized English education. Their [other school's] English education focus on teaching grammar, vocabulary and sentence structures but not on writing SAT-level essays.

➤ Tonka:

...the whole process of writing is given much more importance here than in Bulgaria where teaching writing ends with sentence structure and punctuation and not a lot of emphasis on structure.

Lack of Instruction in “Process”

➤ ***Valuing Written Accents Summary:***

In most of the countries in which our informants were educated, whether high school or college, they did not take courses in writing nor were they given instruction in how to write the papers which were required in many of their courses. It is taken for granted that they already know how to write based on instruction they received early in their schooling on shaping the letters of the alphabet and learning the principals of grammar. The assumption is that if they have the information in their heads, they should be able to put it on paper clearly in a style reflective of the linguistic and cultural preferences of their native countries and/or locales. Writing processes, in other words, are almost completely transparent, and decisions about structure and organization are left up to the students. Until they came to the U.S., most of our informants did not have a language for talking about writing as discovery, about thesis and topic sentences, and, except very generally, about the genres of academic writing.

R & C Courses

- Students' initial exposure to U.S. academic writing expectations received in R&C courses.
- Audience Expectations
 - Analysis
 - Structure
 - Style

California Higher Education: Language Competencies

Academic Literacy: A Statement of
Competencies Expected of Students
Entering California's Public Colleges and
Universities (2002)

Intersegmental Committee of the Academic
Senates of the California Community Colleges,
the California State University, and the University
of California.

ICAS Academic Literacy

- Reports on a survey of CCC, CSU and UC faculty about reading/writing expectations and student assessment
 - 62% taught disciplinary courses
 - 38% taught FYC courses

ICAS Faculty Survey

- Faculty in all 3 segments agreed that in the process of writing, students should:
 - discover and learn new ideas
 - generate ideas for writing by using texts, past experience, observations
 - revise to improve focus, support and organization
 - edit to eliminate errors in grammar and mechanics

Faculty Assessment: Students' Preparation

Mismatch between preparation and needed abilities

- Only about one-third of students sufficiently prepared for two most frequently assigned writing tasks:
 - analyzing information or arguments
 - synthesizing information from several sources

Models: Making Expectations Clear

➤ **Diana:**

I'm interested in copying; we didn't learn like that in Columbia. Here, professors give us sample papers, so you just follow the structure and what they're supposed to look like, but not like copying word for word. I appreciate the sample papers; I think it's a great idea to really understand what they want for the paper.

➤ If you want to be proficient in academic writing in any field, you have to learn. You have to see how people write in your field, by reading a lot. I'm grateful to my professors for making me read a lot just because it's easy to adjust your writing when you mimic someone's writing in a way. Mimic the style, mimic the structure. So I read a lot before I started being proficient.

Sample Model

➤ Econometrics Paper

Writing Assignments

- Crafting: [Colorado State Writing Studio Guide](#)
 - Questions for design and evaluation

- Teaching: Building in process (See sequencing handout)
 - “Sub” Assignments
 - Mini-Lessons
 - Peer Sessions

- Feedback
 - Marking Techniques
 - Role of Clarity and Accuracy

Writing from Sources Activity

- GSI Teaching and Resource Center:
Preventing Academic Misconduct Paraphrasing
Exercise
- [http://gsi.berkeley.edu/teachingguide/misconduct/
exercise.html](http://gsi.berkeley.edu/teachingguide/misconduct/exercise.html)

Feedback

➤ Coding

➤ Minimal Marking

(See Feedback Samples)