

ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC STUDY SERIES

# STUDY SKILLS FOR ACADEMIC WRITING

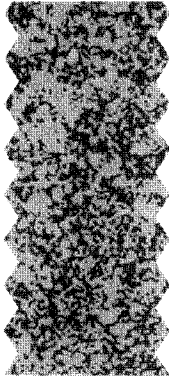
## Student's Book

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# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> . . . . .	<b>1</b>
<b>Unit 1: Surveying material</b> . . . . .	<b>3</b>
• Surveying a book or an article	
<b>Unit 2: Note-taking and summarising skills</b> . . . . .	<b>19</b>
• Suggestions for note-taking	
• Different types of summarising	
• Avoiding plagiarism	
<b>Unit 3: Writing skills</b> . . . . .	<b>56</b>
• Incorporating source material	
• Dividing a text into paragraphs	
• Writing introductions and conclusions	
• Synthesising from different sources	
<b>Unit 4: Towards extended writing</b> . . . . .	<b>97</b>
• Including tables and figures	
• Layout of written work	
• Stages of extended writing	
• Writing a bibliography	
<b>Unit 5: Writing the extended essay</b> . . . . .	<b>111</b>
• Choosing a topic, collecting data	
• Revising and proof-reading	
• Abbreviations	

# UNIT 5

GUIDE

## WRITING THE EXTENDED ESSAY

MAIN SKILLS	TASKS CORRESPONDING TO SKILLS
EXTENDED WRITING .....	MAIN TASK
REVISING .....	ADDITIONAL TASK

### AIMS

The main aim of this unit is to produce an extended piece of writing based on research in your subject area. The topic chosen should be more specific than for your essay at the end of Unit 4 and should be treated in greater depth. You should approach the work as if you were asked to produce a piece of work by your future department on your main course.

Prior to the written work you will discuss the 'Guide' section with your teacher. This focuses on:

1. Choosing a topic
2. Collecting data
3. Writing the paper
4. Writer's block
5. Revising
6. Proof-reading
7. Abbreviations commonly used in academic writing.

### 1. CHOOSING A TOPIC

It may be difficult to select a topic for a piece of extended writing. This may be because the area of study is new to you, or because you roughly know the area you are interested in but are not sure what topic to follow up. Various approaches for

selecting a topic are suggested below. You might like to combine a variety of these, assuming you have access to subject specialist sources.

Find out what has been done before. You can do this in several ways:

- (a) Refer to your department.
  - Consult a course outline.
  - Discuss areas of interest with your tutor/fellow students.
  - Browse through previous dissertations of predecessors on higher degree courses.
- (b) Go to a university or college library.
  - Look through some research journals.
  - Consult a catalogue and look under specific topic areas.
  - Skim through an index to theses accepted for higher degrees by universities in an English-speaking country.

Once you have found out what has been done on the subject it will be easier for you to identify a gap in a well-researched area you are interested in. Now write down a brief title for your essay. It is important for you to do this before you do more reading as you may have now found which direction to follow. If you do not write the title down, you may feel an area has been over-researched and has nothing more to offer, when in fact an interesting gap in the research exists that you may be able to fill.

## 2. COLLECTING DATA

If your chosen topic is a new field of study or you have discovered a gap in research, you may find there is a *lack* of literature relating specifically to your chosen area. If this is the case, consider what line of research you should follow. What problems do you envisage? How far will current literature and research relate to this new area? Will you need to carry out primary research (e.g. experiments, interviews, questionnaires) to support your ideas?

- (a) Discover important sources.
  - Consult your department as to any recognised authorities or important published works.
  - Consult a library catalogue for authors who have published books and for collected editions of articles in your area.
  - Follow up references in your reading. Familiar references which occur repeatedly in different works will indicate that you are becoming more knowledgeable *and* are recognising authorities.
  - Check in the prefaces or forewords of books for mentions of your topic.
  - Be aware of possible rival or alternative hypotheses or interpretations of data.

(b) Be selective.

- Only read information which is relevant to your topic. You may only need to read a particular section or part of a chapter from a book. Checking the contents page and the index of a book will help you here.
- Assess the importance of what you read. How reliable are the findings of any research? What is the relevance for your chosen topic?

If you are breaking new ground, then in your paper you will need to discuss the reasons for the lack of literature pertaining specifically to your topic area. What areas need to be researched? Are you able to extrapolate ideas from other research or literature to use in your topic area?

### 3. WRITING THE PAPER

You should produce a balanced, coherent piece of work which compares ideas from more than one source. Ensure that you provide additional comment on these ideas and do not merely present them. Be selective and, where appropriate, use source materials to support or challenge a particular position in your work.

Do not worry if, as you write, you deviate somewhat from your original outline. You may have discovered interesting information or developed lines of thought which you had not originally been able to anticipate.

### 4. WRITER'S BLOCK

The term *writer's block* is used to describe the condition in which your mind goes blank and you have no ideas, or you feel that you cannot express your ideas clearly. This strikes all writers at some time. It can be interpreted as a healthy sign that you are overtaxing the brain in one particular way and should not be a cause for alarm. The following hints may help:

- (a) Read over what you have written.
- (b) Try recopying sections of your work. You may find that ideas occur to you while you are doing this. Note the ideas down (even if they are one word only). Try extending the ideas into sentences.
- (c) Relax and do something else. Later you may find that your mind has cleared.
- (d) Move to a different section of your work and try working on it.
- (e) Do something fairly mechanical, such as writing out your contents and bibliography page. You will have spent time productively and given your mind the opportunity to process your ideas.
- (f) Proof-read your work (see Section 6 below).

- (g) Go back to your reading sources, or read a related article or chapter. Reading frequently will improve your writing skills, suggest ideas and clarify your thoughts.

## 5. REVISING

Revising your work means checking for any improvements that need to be made. You may have to do this one or more times before you write your final draft.

- (a) Organisation:
- Have you presented your work in the most effective way?
  - Is there a logical presentation and progression of ideas or do paragraphs/sections need re-ordering?
- (b) Content:
- Is the content appropriate to the title and the introduction?
  - Is there a clear presentation and development of ideas?
  - Is all information relevant? Check for any information that may be interesting but is irrelevant to the topic, redundant or repetitive.
  - Do you give reasons for the points you introduce?
  - Do you incorporate too much or too little supporting information?
- (c) Clarity:
- Is the reader able to follow your line of reasoning?
  - Have you integrated important ideas/sources of information when and where required, and in a clear way?
  - Do all sentences/paragraphs have a logical connection with preceding/following sentences/paragraphs?
- (d) Language:
- Have you selected an appropriate level of formality (e.g. no use of contractions such as *it's* instead of *it is*)?
  - Is your language too complex or too simplistic?
  - Is your linguistic referencing too vague (e.g. over-use of pronouns or imprecise vocabulary)?
  - Have you kept to the objective structures that characterise academic writing, such as impersonal forms and passive verbs?
- (e) Clear sections:
- Have you written a clear introduction and conclusion?
- (f) Reference to sources:
- Have you acknowledged all sources and given clear bibliographical details?
  - Have you integrated your material (including any tables and illustrations) clearly and at relevant points in your work?

## 6. PROOF-READING

Proof-reading means checking your work for errors in spelling and style and checking that you have met the format requirements of your subject/department.

- (a) Features of language use that you should check include:
- subject/verb agreement
  - verb tense
  - the presence of a verb in a sentence
  - the presence of a subject in a sentence
  - word order
  - correct word class (e.g. noun, adjective, adverb, verb)
  - punctuation
  - linking words to show logical progression of ideas.
- (b) Layout  
See Unit 4.

## 7. LATIN ABBREVIATIONS AND WORDS COMMONLY USED IN ACADEMIC WRITING

The following Latin abbreviations and words are commonly used in academic writing. Several of them have been used in this book:

Abbreviation	Latin	English meaning
c. or ca	circa	approximately, about (for dates)
cf.	confer	compare
e.g.	exempli gratia	for example, for instance
<i>et al.</i>	et alii, et alia	and other people/things
etc.	et cetera	and so on, and the rest
<i>et seq.</i>	et sequens	and the following pages
<i>ibid.</i>	ibidem	in the same place (usually referring to a reference)
i.e.	id est	that is, in other words
inter alia	inter alia	among other things
<i>loc. cit.</i>	loco citato	in the place mentioned
NB	nota bene	note well or carefully (for an important point)
<i>op. cit.</i>	opere citato	in the work mentioned before
passim	passim	at many points, recurrent
viz.	videlicet	namely (naming someone/something you have just referred to)

Some of the above abbreviations may be new to you. Only use them in your own writing if you are confident you are using them correctly. Reading widely and

noting when and how they are used will help you assess their correct use. Below are examples of how some of the abbreviations may be used.

- (a) *et al.* This is used when a book was written by joint authors/editors. Only the first author/editor is given in your paper to save space. Refer to the bibliography for the names of the other authors/editors (e.g. Ochs *et al.*, 1983: 71).
- (b) *ibid.* When making consecutive references to a particular source, *ibid.* can be used instead of repeating the name of the author and the book. If the page number is different from the one previously mentioned, this can be given after *ibid.* (e.g. *ibid.*, p. 22).
- (c) *loc. cit.* This is used when references to a source are not consecutive but the later reference comes closely after the earlier one. It refers to the same author, book *and* page as the earlier reference.
- (d) *op. cit.* This is used when references to the same source follow each other closely but are not consecutive. *Op. cit.* comes after the author's name, and is followed by a page number, i.e. it is like *loc. cit.* except that the page number is different.

Below are examples of references as they might occur in a text:

1. (James: 1991) – normal reference.
2. (Watkins: 1970: 93) – normal reference with page number.
3. (*ibid.*) – repeats reference 2.
4. (*ibid.*, p. 83) – repeats reference 2, but with a different page number.
5. (James, *loc. cit.*) – repeats reference 1.
6. (James, *op. cit.*, p. 57) – repeats reference 1, but with a different page number.





# UNIT 5

## WRITING THE EXTENDED ESSAY: TASKS

### MAIN TASK

In this task you will produce a research paper of 2,000–3,000 words on a topic related to your area of study. The topic selected should be specific in nature. (You may decide to follow up in depth an aspect of the topic you selected for your essay in Unit 4.) You should expect to refer to at least five sources of information.

The greater specificity of the topic you select means that you have to be more selective when choosing source materials. You will probably find that no one article or book deals solely with your topic. In this case you may have to extract relevant information from a wide variety of sources and from source material which may not deal directly with your chosen topic.

Your topic should neither be too complex nor too simplistic. Refer to the 'Guide' section of this unit for how to select your topic and approach the writing phase. You should attempt to improve on any areas of weakness revealed in your Unit 4 essay.

### ADDITIONAL TASK

In the course of this book, you have looked at legitimate ways of incorporating information from other sources and the conventions of presenting an acceptable piece of academic writing. In the following task, you will find examples of wrong language usage which is *not* grammatical or structural and which has not so far been dealt with in this material (except very briefly in Unit 3, Task 10). You may be able to identify some of these types of wrong usage in your own work. The task is not intended to provide you with an exhaustive checklist of non-grammatical errors. However, it might help you in the final stages of your work by drawing attention to some weaknesses you may be less aware of.

Read the extract below and then consider the pieces of writing that follow it. These deal in various ways with some of the content of the extract – some paraphrase its contents; others challenge the writer's point of view.

You are *not* intended to scrutinise the writing carefully for suitability or accuracy of *content*, as you have done with several previous tasks of this kind. Your task is to decide whether the pieces of writing that follow the extract would be acceptable as academic writing. If not, identify the fault as precisely as you can and discuss it with your teacher.

As has been suggested above, the term 'Third World' may have outlived its usefulness. Its use may in fact serve to perpetuate the dependence of lower-income countries on imports from the industrialised world. Advanced technology may be incompatible with the internal realities of those countries, leading to disruptive effects on local lifestyles and the environment. For example, large-scale energy installations may make little sense in predominantly rural societies in which energy from the sun or wind can be harnessed relatively cheaply in the form of small, solar-powered devices or windpumps.

(From R. Grant, 'Future patterns', unpublished monograph, July 1992.)

### Text 1

Let's face it, the term 'Third World' is now distinctly old hat. Even if there's little sign of the gap between the richest and poorest nations narrowing, the end of the Cold War some years ago makes the long-established classification less than useful. It's high time it was done away with, and the absence of any other all-embracing term that might be satisfactory only goes to show we'd be better off considering countries individually rather than lumping them all under one dubious category.

### Text 2

Families uprooted from areas where their people have lived for generations, perhaps centuries, a way of life that is close to the land destroyed. The question we must ask ourselves is, is it worth it? Is it worth paying this price for the progress that advanced technology promises? Is it worth risking displacement and greater unhappiness for scores of people? Is it worth paying hard-earned money which would be better spent on more basic necessities? The answer, my friends, *must* be no!

### Text 3

There is little reason to doubt that, taking into account the undoubtedly enormous costs that could be incurred in the adoption of large-scale projects, it would be advisable for many countries that lack sufficient funds to undertake the construction of large energy installations to consider resorting to other sources, on what is likely to be a substantially smaller scale. This might involve, for example, the harnessing of energy from the sun in the form of small, solar-powered devices or utilising windpumps, two options that may be feasible in a large number of

cases, even taking into account the fact that the initial expenditure on such alternative projects may seem relatively high at this point in time.

#### **Text 4**

As a matter of fact, many countries cannot afford advanced technology. It can be said that a preferable course of action for such countries would be to resort to other forms of technology. The utilisation of small-scale energy installations rather than large ones is a case in point. It goes without saying that this is not always feasible. Indeed, a large nuclear power installation may in fact be considerably cheaper than the introduction of solar-powered devices or windpumps, contrary to what is sometimes maintained (see, for example, Grant, 1992).

#### **Text 5**

I think that for many countries in the so-called 'third world' it is extremely expensive to utilise advanced technology. It can lead to dependence on imports from the countries producing that technology, as well as upsetting local lifestyles and causing environmental damage. From my point of view, a sensible option is to adopt cheaper, small-scale alternatives. For example, I am inclined to think that introducing windpumps may, in some instances, be infinitely preferable to a large installation.

#### **Text 6**

The next point I should like to draw your attention to is a matter of considerable importance which has so far not been dealt with in this essay. I would like to raise the question of the suitability of advanced technology in the developing world. Critics have often commented on the cost and incompatibility of such technology in countries which have not reached the stage of industrialisation (Grant, 1992). What sense is there, for example, in spending vast sums of money on large-scale projects when a country can cheaply and easily resort to small-scale ones?

#### **Text 7**

As Grant (1992) suggests, it is absolute nonsense to expect a developing country to introduce large-scale energy plants when it can harness energy far more cheaply from the wind and the sun on a small scale. Only a completely naive simpleton could believe that an inevitable outcome of using one form of advanced technology would be to lead automatically to the development of other forms in the country concerned. It is patently obvious that when developing countries acquire advanced technology from the industrialised world it only serves to further the chronic dependence of the former on the latter.

**Text 8**

Last but not least, some attention must be given to the matter of suitability of technology. To adopt advanced technology or not to adopt it, that is the question. It is not in every case that small-scale alternatives prove to be cheaper. In fact, in the case of some types of technology, such options may be few and far between.

**Text 9**

Research by Grant (1992) established conclusively that advanced technology may often not suit poorer countries. As he discovered, in places where cheap utilisation of solar energy is possible, large-scale energy installations may not be the best option.