Writing in the discipline: Objectives

- To establish familiarity with ways of analysing and evaluating academic writing
- To identify criteria for good writing
- To identify approaches to develop one's writing
- To practise writing and receive feedback

Plan (subject to change)

- **Week 9**
  - The process of writing
  - Criteria for evaluating writing
  - Diagnostic writing task
  - Preparation for next week's assignment
- **Week 10**
  - Feedback on diagnostic task
  - Argumentation
  - Structuring writing
  - Communicative purpose & readability
  - Completing writing assignment
- **Week 11**
  - Feedback on assignment
  - Use of sources
  - Coherence
  - Accuracy

Contact information

- Alan Evison
- Queens Building Room OB3 (East Basement corridor)
- Tel: 020 7882 3773
- Email: a.i.d.evison@qmul.ac.uk
- Web site: www.learndev.qmul.ac.uk/elss/

The process of writing

- Study the question / problem and consider the purpose of what you will write
- Consider the needs of the reader
- Plan
  - To organise thought (brainstorming, various forms of notes)
  - To organise written words (outline)
  (N.B. This stage usefully involves TALKING, as do other stages in the process.)
  - (Write brief synopsis to discuss with supervisor / mentor - optional)
  - Produce a first draft
  - Revise:
    - content
    - structure of information
    - argument
  - Produce a second draft
  - Revise:
    - for accuracy
    - for clarity
    - for cohesiveness
    - for readability and interest

Diagnostic writing task

The IT company you work for is interested in tendering for a contract to design a computerised drug prescription system for use in NHS hospitals. Your manager has asked you to make a preliminary study of the issues involved and write a short paper for him which will help him to draft a proposal for this work.

1. Read the 'Independent' article.
   (You can also refer to the BBC web site article, 'Prescription drug deaths surge', if you like.)
2. In groups, brainstorm the key issues which your company should take into consideration.
3. Draft a discussion paper of about 300 words.
   (More weight will be given to style, clarity, organisation and development of an argument than to scientific knowledge.)

Evaluation criteria

- Evidence of reading and understanding the question / problem
  - Awareness of relevance; appropriate and sufficient use of sources
- Quality of analysis / argument
  - Range & depth of argument; logic of argument
- Organisation and development
  - Logical & clear arrangement of ideas; effective use of transitions; paragraphing
- Clarity and style
  - Readability; appropriate voice, tone & style; clarity & variety of sentence structure
- Sentence structure and mechanics
  - Grammatical accuracy; punctuation; spelling; manuscript presentation
Evaluating writing - 1

High-order questions:
1. Do I have a thesis that addresses the question?
2. If yes, what is the quality of the argument?
3. Is the draft organised at the macro level?
4. Is it effectively organised at the micro level?

Proceed to lower-order concerns only when a draft is reasonably successful at the higher levels.

Evaluating writing - 2

Lower-order questions:
1. Do I give the reader the help needed to follow the development of ideas without strain?
2. Does the style not only do justice to the complexity of the ideas but also maintain the reader’s interest?
3. Is the writing clear and direct, using the simplest expressions and structures that will carry my full meaning?
4. Is the draft free of errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling?

Preparation for writing assignment

Process
- Reading (you can divide this among group members)
- Summarising
- Synthesising information
- Developing an argument
- Planning
- Writing a draft

Assignment brief

Your proposal to design a computerised drug prescription system for the NHS has been received with interest. However, the NHS managers have queried the length of time you say it will take to develop the software and have asked you to justify it.

Write a letter explaining why software projects of this type require lengthy development. Refer in particular to the issues that arise from large-scale developments. Bear in mind that the NHS managers are busy people and are not experts in the field.

Your letter should be no more than 500 words.

You should plan your letter and produce a draft by Tuesday, 26th November. You will be given time during the class to revise your draft and produce a final version. I will take this in at the end of the class.


Week 10 overview

- Feedback on diagnostic task
- Summary
- Argument
- Structuring writing
- Completing assignment

Summary

- Generalising
- Selecting and rejecting information
- Compressing:
  - syntax
  - vocabulary

Since-then-because arguments
Since
You are eating too many sweets
Then
You will spoil your teeth
Because
Sugar is not good for your teeth

Since-then-because arguments
Then
we’re expecting a statement will be made.
Because
when ministers say ‘No statement is expected’ it’s a sure sign that a statement will be made.
Since
ministers are saying no statement is expected.

Week 11 overview
- Feedback on assignment
- Structuring writing
- Use of sources
- Coherence
- Accuracy

Structuring writing
- Paragraphing:
  - Tasks:
    - identifying paragraph divisions
    - ordering paragraphs
  - General to particular development
    - Writing effectively is not just a question of employing an appropriate style; it is equally important that your writing is clearly organised. This involves not only the way in which you plan and arrange your overall argument, it also involves the way in which each paragraph or section of your text is arranged.
- Topic sentences

Topic sentences
Depending on their geographic location, societies differ in how readily they can receive technology by diffusion from other societies. ... The importance of diffusion, and of geographic location in making it possible, is strikingly illustrated by some otherwise incomprehensible cases of societies that abandoned powerful technologies. ... A famous example involves Japan’s abandonment of guns. ... But there were also factors working against the acceptance of firearms in Japan. ... Contemporary European rulers also included some who despised guns and tried to restrict their availability. ... That rejection and China’s abandonment of oceangoing ships (as well as of mechanical clocks and water-driven spinning machines) are well-known historical instances of technological reversals in isolated or semi-isolated societies. ... These examples, at first so bizarre to us, illustrate well the roles of geography and of diffusion in the history of technology. ...
Use of sources: types of reference

1. Direct quotation – complete sentence(s)
2. Direct quotation – partial, within your sentence
3. Paraphrase or summary of someone’s words or ideas
4. Interpretation or comment on someone’s ideas

Read the paragraph on the next slide and identify examples of these four types of reference.

Identifying types of reference

The Meaning of Affirmative Action

There is much confusion concerning the meaning of affirmative action (Fullinwider 1980, 159) resulting, in significant part, from the vast array of often inconsistent practices and policies that fall under that rubric (ibid., chaps. 11, 12). The broad scope and seeming elasticity of the term emerges clearly from the following definition provided by Greenawalt: “Affirmative action” is a phrase that refers to attempts to bring members of underrepresented groups, usually groups that have suffered discrimination, into a higher degree of participation in some beneficial program. Some affirmative action efforts include preferential treatment; others do not.” (Greenawalt 1983, 17). In addition, affirmative action has also been associated with the imposition of “quotas” and “goals” (ibid). Another term often associated with affirmative action is reverse discrimination, which, in Greenawalt’s words, “means a difference in treatment that reverses the pattern of earlier discrimination” (ibid., 16).

Coherence

What follows on the next two slides are two explanations of “the old/new contract”:


One follows the principle of old-before-new and the other doesn’t.

1. Which one is easier to understand?
2. Why?

Version 2

Another principle for writing clear closed-form prose is the old/new contract. The old/new contract asks writers to begin sentences with something old – something that links back to what has gone before – and then to end sentences with new information that advances the argument. Following this principle creates an effect called coherence, which is closely related to unity. Whereas unity refers to the clear relationship between the body of a paragraph and its topic sentence, between the parts and the whole, coherence refers to the clear relationship between one sentence and the next, between part and part.

Accuracy of language

- Common grammar problems
- Overview of sentence types
  - Simple
  - Compound
  - Complex
- Punctuation and spelling
Simple, compound and complex sentences

- Simple (SVO):
  - The dog bit the man.
- Compound:
  - The dog bit the man and ran off.
- Complex:
  - The dog, which had never been known to be vicious, bit the man.

How sentences go wrong

1. Sentence fragments:
   - The chemical mixture gave off a pungent smell. While the colour remained the same.
2. Comma splices:
   - Water is the most important compound on earth. It is found on the surface and in the atmosphere. It is also present in animals and plants.
3. Lack of agreement:
   - Managers have a tendency to see appraising solely as a means of informing their subordinates of their weaknesses, as the time to tell him to 'pull his socks up'.
4. Hanging participles:
   - Having administered the questionnaire, the responses were analysed using a standard statistical package.
5. Inappropriate use of active or passive voice:
   - "The subject position in a sentence is where we normally place (and look for) the theme or focus of that sentence… By using the passive construction, we move the centre of interest from the 'performer' to the 'undergoer' of the action."
6. ‘Squinting’ modifiers:
   - The council advises physicians at regular intervals to administer the drug.