

# Academic Writing

## (1. Basic Skills)

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# Why Writing/Publishing?

- to disseminate your research globally
- to build your professional reputation (to be considered an expert)
- to be searchable on-line
- to be cited and quoted
- to enhance your CV/profile
- to stop others taking credit for your work
- because your department requires you to do so
- ...

# What are the differences?

A lot of people think that the weather is getting worse. They say that this has been going on for quite a long time. I think that they are quite right. Research has shown that we now get storms etc all the time.

It is widely believed that the climate is deteriorating. It is claimed that this process has been continuing for nearly 100 years. This belief appears to be supported by McKinley (1997) who shows a 55% increase in the frequency of severe winter gales since 1905.

*(Source: Bailey, Academic Writing: A handbook for International Students, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2006)*

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# The Nature of Academic Writing

- Scientific text is precise, impersonal and objective.
  - Your paper is understood to present your own opinion. Therefore, phrases such as “in my opinion” or “I think,” are superfluous and a waste of words.
- It typically uses complex terminology, and various footnoting/referencing systems.

# Essential Writing Skills

## Summarizing and paraphrasing

- Academic writing requires that you are skilled in identifying and presenting complex ideas and arguments.
- Summarizing and paraphrasing are two of the most important skills-set.
  - Summarizing is expressing someone's work in a reduced manner, capturing the most important points.
  - Paraphrasing is expressing someone else's ideas in your own words. Effective paraphrasing is vital in academic writing to avoid the risk of plagiarism.

Researchers in France and the United States have recently reported that baboons are able to think abstractly. It has been known for some time that chimpanzees are capable of abstract thought, but baboons are a more distant relation to mankind. In the experiment, scientists trained two baboons to use a personal computer and a joystick. The animals had to match computer designs which were basically the same, but had superficial differences. In the experiment the baboons performed better than would be expected by chance. The researchers describe their study in an article in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology*.

*(Source: Bailey, Academic Writing: A handbook for International Students, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2006)*

## Summarizing: Example

(a) According to a recent article in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, baboons are able to think in an abstract way. The article describes how researchers trained two baboons to use a personal computer and a joystick. The animals did better than would be expected.

(b) French and American scientists have shown for the first time that baboons have the ability to think in an abstract way. The animals were taught to use a computer, and then had to select patterns that were similar, which they did at a rate better than chance.

# Paraphrasing: Example

- The growth of the car industry parallels the development of modern capitalism.
- The rise of the automobile industry matches the progress of contemporary capitalism.
  
- Evidence of a lost civilization has been found off the coast of China.
- Remains of an ancient society have been discovered in the sea near China.

*(Source: Bailey, Academic Writing: A handbook for International Students, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2006)*

Someone professionals argue that you must do more than merely substitute phrases here and there. You must also completely alter the sentence structure.

- **Clarity**
  - If it can be misinterpreted, then it is wrong.
- **Conciseness**
  - Shortening the text without reducing clarity
  - Not the same as brevity
  - If a word or phrase can be removed or shortened without losing meaning, do it.

- Technical professionals are busy people.
- Some professionals believe that a long discussion implies weak methods and/or results.

# Combining Sources: Example

## Source A

Genetic modification (GM) is the most recent application of biotechnology to food, which can also be called genetic engineering or genetic manipulation. The phrase ‘genetically modified organisms’ or GMOs is used frequently in the scientific literature to describe plants and animals which have had DNA introduced into them by means other than the ‘natural’ process of an egg and a sperm.

New species have always evolved through natural selection by means of random genetic variation. Early farmers used this natural variation to selectively breed wild animals, plants and even micro-organisms such as yogurt cultures and yeasts. They produced domesticated variants better suited to the needs of humans, long before the scientific basis for the process was understood. Despite this long history of careful improvement, such procedures are now labelled ‘interfering with nature’.

*(Source: Bailey, Academic Writing: A handbook for International Students, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2006)*

## Source B

Genetic modification (GM) is in fact far more than a mere development of selective breeding techniques. Combining genetic material from species that cannot breed naturally is an interference in areas which may be highly dangerous. The consequences of this kind of manipulation cannot be foreseen.

It seems undeniable that these processes may lead to major benefits in food production and the environment.

Furthermore, there is no doubt that some medical advances may have saved millions of lives. However, this level of technology can contain a strong element of risk.

Our ignorance of the long-term effects of releasing GM plants or even animals into the environment means that this step should only be taken after very careful consideration.

# Combining Sources: Example

## Essay extract: Should genetically modified (GM) foods have a role in future agriculture?

It has been claimed that GM technology is no different from breeding techniques which have been practiced by man for thousands of years. Source A states that this process is similar to natural selection and remarks: ‘such procedures are now labelled “interfering with nature”’. On the other hand, Source B considers that, although GM technology could bring considerable benefits in medicine and agriculture, it is quite different to traditional processes of selection. He believes that crossing the species barrier is a dangerous step and that there is insufficient knowledge of the long-term results of such developments.

*(Source: Bailey, Academic Writing: A handbook for International Students, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2006)*

What phrase is used to mark the point in the text where there is a shift from one point of view to another?  
What phrases are used to introduce summaries?

# Combining Sources: Example

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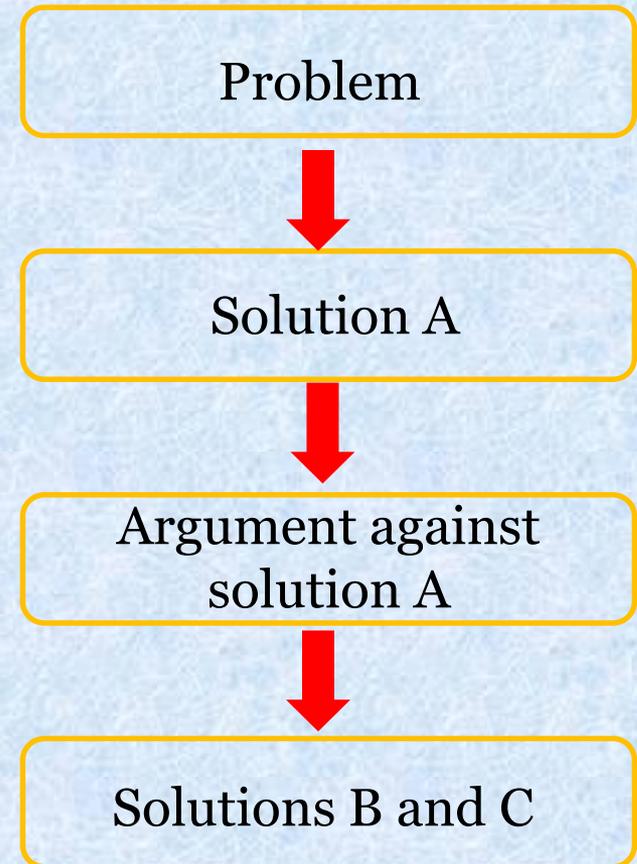
# Developing an Argument

- You are expected to be able to defend your own claims and to persuade the reader that your claims are considered, reasonable, credible and valid.
- You will need facts, statistics, scholarly and authoritative sources of literature, examples and cases to develop and defend your argument.
- You may be required to make an argument about which there is divided opinion.
  - You should demonstrate that you are aware of the range of the current opinions.
  - You should be able to provide clear evidence to support your point of view.

# Argument: Example

Currently, roads are often congested, which is expensive in terms of delays. It is claimed that building more roads, or widening existing ones, would ease the congestion. But not only is the cost of such work high, but the construction process adds to the congestion, while the resulting extra road space may encourage extra traffic. Therefore constructing extra roads is unlikely to solve the problem, and other remedies, such as road pricing or greater use of public transport, should be examined.

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# Developing Coherent Paragraphs

- State the central idea of each paragraph explicitly in a topic sentence
- Expand on the topic sentences
- Show connections
  - Use linking words (therefore, in addition, on the other hand, ...)
  - Deliberate repetition of key words

# Developing Coherent Paragraphs: Example

It's perhaps not surprising that Marshall McLuhan, the most influential **communications** expert of the twentieth century, was a **Canadian**. As a **nation**, we have been **preoccupied** with forging **communication** links among a sparse, widespread population. The old **Canadian** one-dollar bill, with its line of telephone poles receding to the distant horizon, illustrates this **preoccupation**. Year after year we strive to maintain a **national** radio and television broadcasting system in the face of foreign competition. We have been aggressive in entering the international high technology market with our **telecommunications** equipment.

*(Source: Northey, Impact: A Guide to Business Communication. Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 1993)*

# Getting the Most out of Reading

- Read efficiently
  - It isn't really a matter of reading fast, but of **focusing selectively**.
  - Read the abstract first to see if the article will be of use to you.
  - Keep a specific set of goals in mind as you scan the text, and avoid becoming distracted by other material.
  - Read carefully the first one or two sentences of each paragraph, as well as the concluding sentence or sentences.

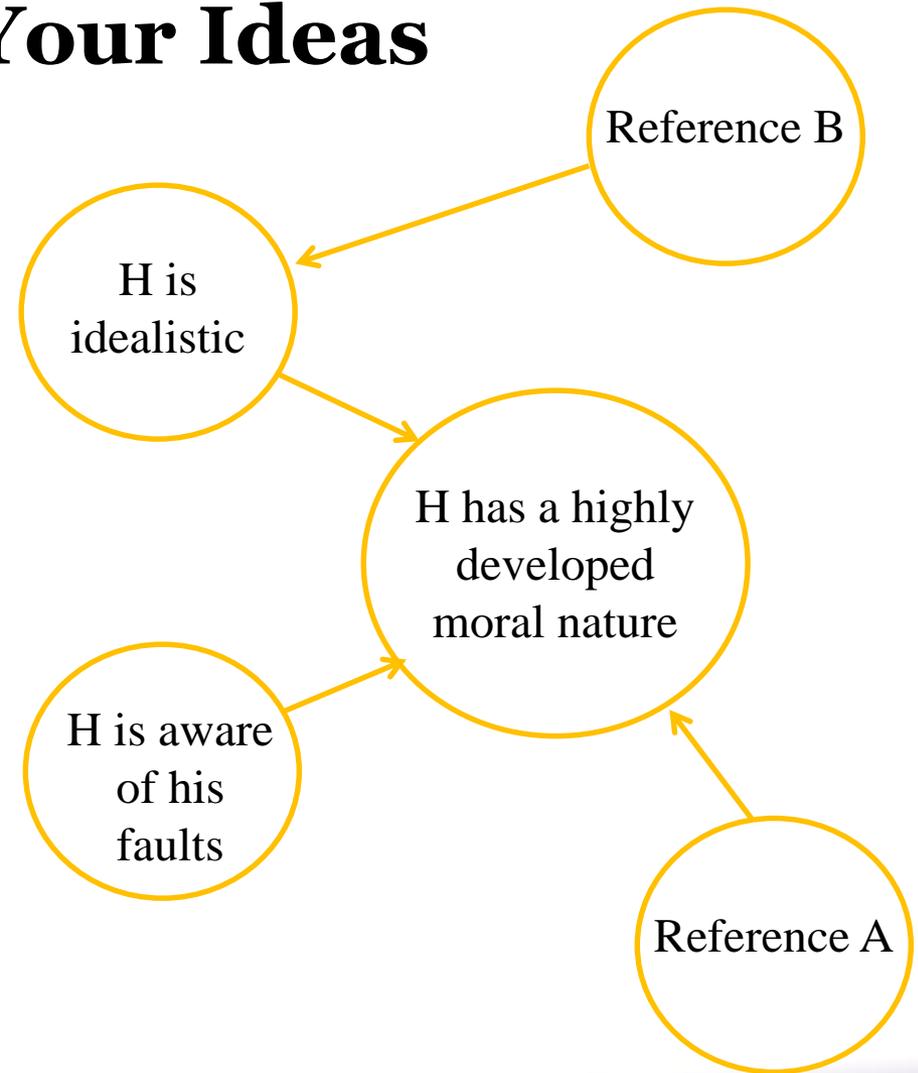
Ask yourself questions about the specific topic.

Look for controversies in the material to find issues that need discussing.

# Organizing Your Ideas

## Visualize on one page

- When you have an idea, write it down and draw a circle around it.
- When you have another idea or a reference which supports this idea, do the same, and connect the two circles with a line.
- Get your ideas on one page, so you can see them all at once.



*(Credit: Jerry Plotnick. University of Toronto)*

# Providing References

- Avoid the charge of plagiarism
- Obtain more authority to your writing
- Allow the reader to find the original source

# Verbs of Reference

## Pattern 1: verb + **that**

assert	assume	believe	claim
conclude	consider	decide	demonstrate
determine	discover	emphasize	explain
find	imply	indicate	note
observe	point out	prove	reveal
show	state	suggest	think

## Reaction to another writer's position

accept	admit	agree
argue	deny	doubt

## Pattern 2: verb + sbd/sth + **for**

blame	criticize	praise
ridicule	Single out	thank

## Pattern 3: verb + sbd/sth + **as**

assess	characterize	classify
define	depict	describe
evaluate	identify	interpret
present	refer	view

Don't keep repeating "XXX says." There is a wide choice of verbs of reference.

- What do you find difficult about academic writing?
- How would you make improvement?
- Please take a couple of minutes to discuss with your neighbors and then share...